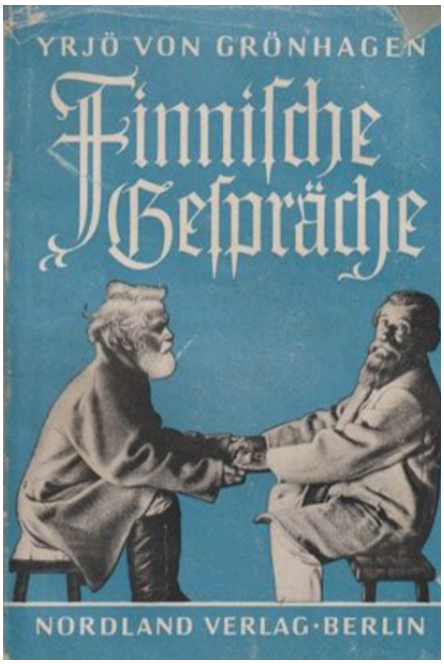
# Finnish Conversations




**by Yrjö von Grönhagen**

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**1941**

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## Forward

This book is not intended to focus on modern technology, the diverse economy, or the countless new settlements, nor I do not cite any statistics - rather, my wish is that the reader may become acquainted with the inner essence of my country, with something of the soul of the Finnish people.
During many research trips, especially through Karelia, I lived among the simple, patriarchal farmers of my homeland and came to know their upright way of thinking and feeling, the security of their way of life, and their confidence in the struggle for existence: the “Conversations” now presented here arose from my conversations with them in fields and forests and in their homes over a cup of coffee brewed in the Finnish manner.
Those who look more deeply will find, in the mirror of the Nordic peasantry’s intimate connection to the soil of their homeland, the source of strength that enables the Finnish people to achieve their cultural accomplishments, to display tenacious determination in peaceful competition, and to persevere unshakably in every serious struggle - thus, the book is above all a monument to the Karelian peasant and the great sons of the Finnish people—but no less a token of gratitude to my German friends.
I spent many fruitful years in Germany and never felt like a stranger there; the poet Hanns Johst may have felt similarly when he set foot on Finnish soil and wrote:

*“Perhaps one must have lived in seclusion by a lake for sixteen years, and wandered alone in the forest for hours every day, to understand the feeling that immediately filled me with strength and joy upon entering this country: I was home.”*

**- Yrjö von Grönhagen**
**Berlin, May 1941**

## The Country

Helsinki, the radiant city by the sea, combines the vibrant life of a culturally and economically pivotal capital with the bustling activity of the harbor.
At every turn, one senses the determination of this purposeful nation to build a better future: the simple wooden structures of the past have now been replaced by tall, modern office buildings in the city center and by single- and two-family homes in the suburbs.
One is not trapped in a sea of stone however, for everywhere the eye glides over open squares with flowers and tall trees, over pines with their reddish-shimmering trunks and densely branched canopies: here the birches glow white, and on the ancient rock formations—which were laboriously quarried in places to build houses—the people of Helsinki sit in the evening and gaze out at the vast expanse of sea, where the sun dips below the horizon in colors so varied that only the North knows them.

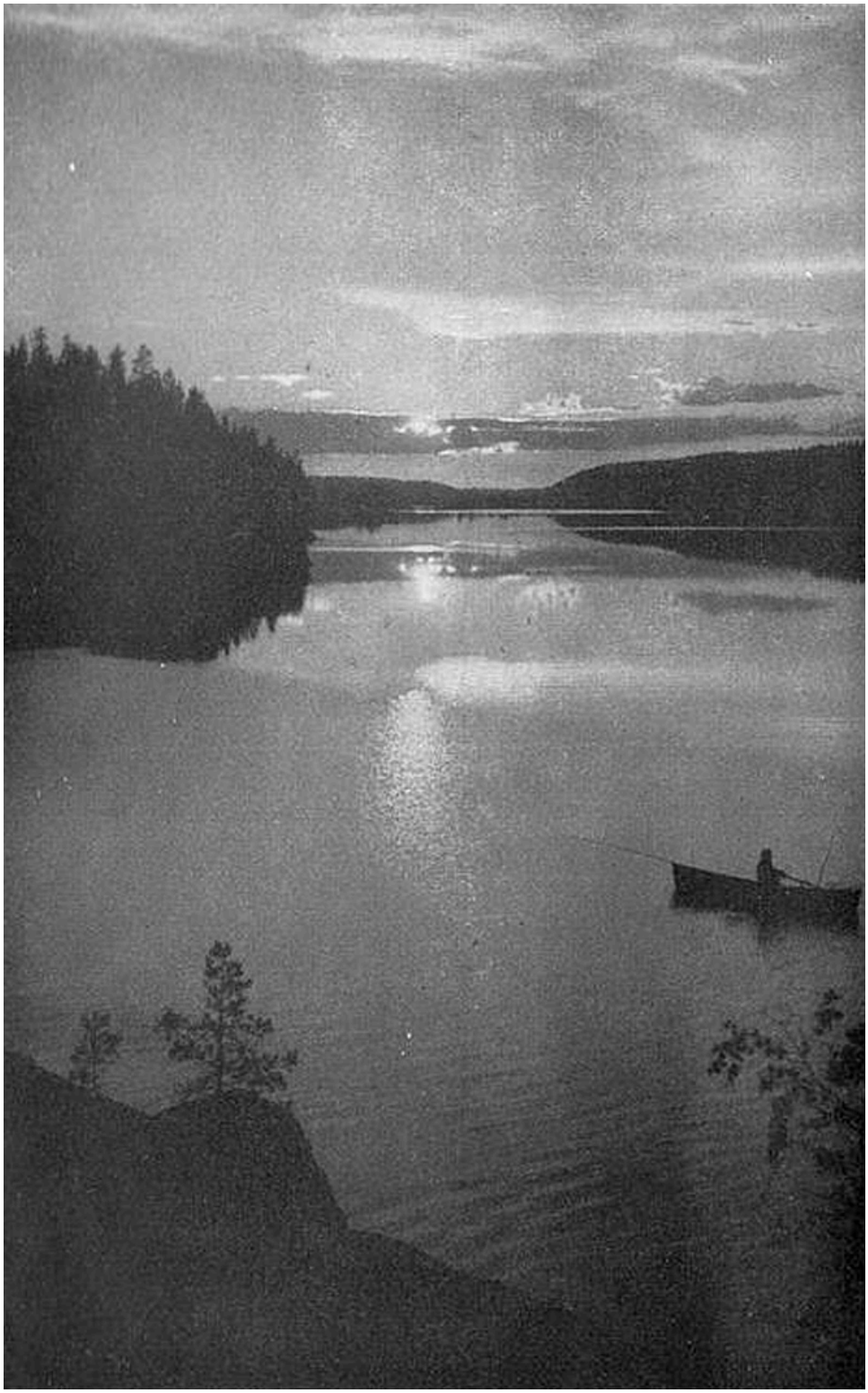
The view as we enter the harbor is festive: the clouds and houses glow white, while the sky and the sea are blue—these are also the national colors of Finland.
From Helsinki, the train takes us swiftly northward into the interior where we pass vast fertile plains, picturesque wooden villages, and endless lakes; steep rock formations and long stretches of forest rise between the waters, and at times, tree trunks cover the banks of rivers and lakes for miles as they are transported to the site of shipment or careful wood processing.
Finnish natural beauty is particularly evident in the hilly landscape of northeastern Suomi, for as far as the eye can see, a narrow strip of ancient rock stretches in a straight line from north to south - massive boulders were piled up by the Ice Age, and from their peaks, the hiker's gaze glides over majestic forest ridges reminiscent of Germany's Harz Mountains.
Amidst the forests lie clear, silvery lakes, crisscrossed by long chains of islands, and far on the horizon, the barely visible lines of the primeval forests merge with the delicate hues of the sky: the midnight sun, the hours of the Northern Lights, and the crystalline starry nights are unforgettable to everyone.

Especially in Lapland, the bright nights captivate the observer's senses, where rounded, treeless mountain peaks stretch for miles, lying in the twilight like the backs of great, sleeping animals.

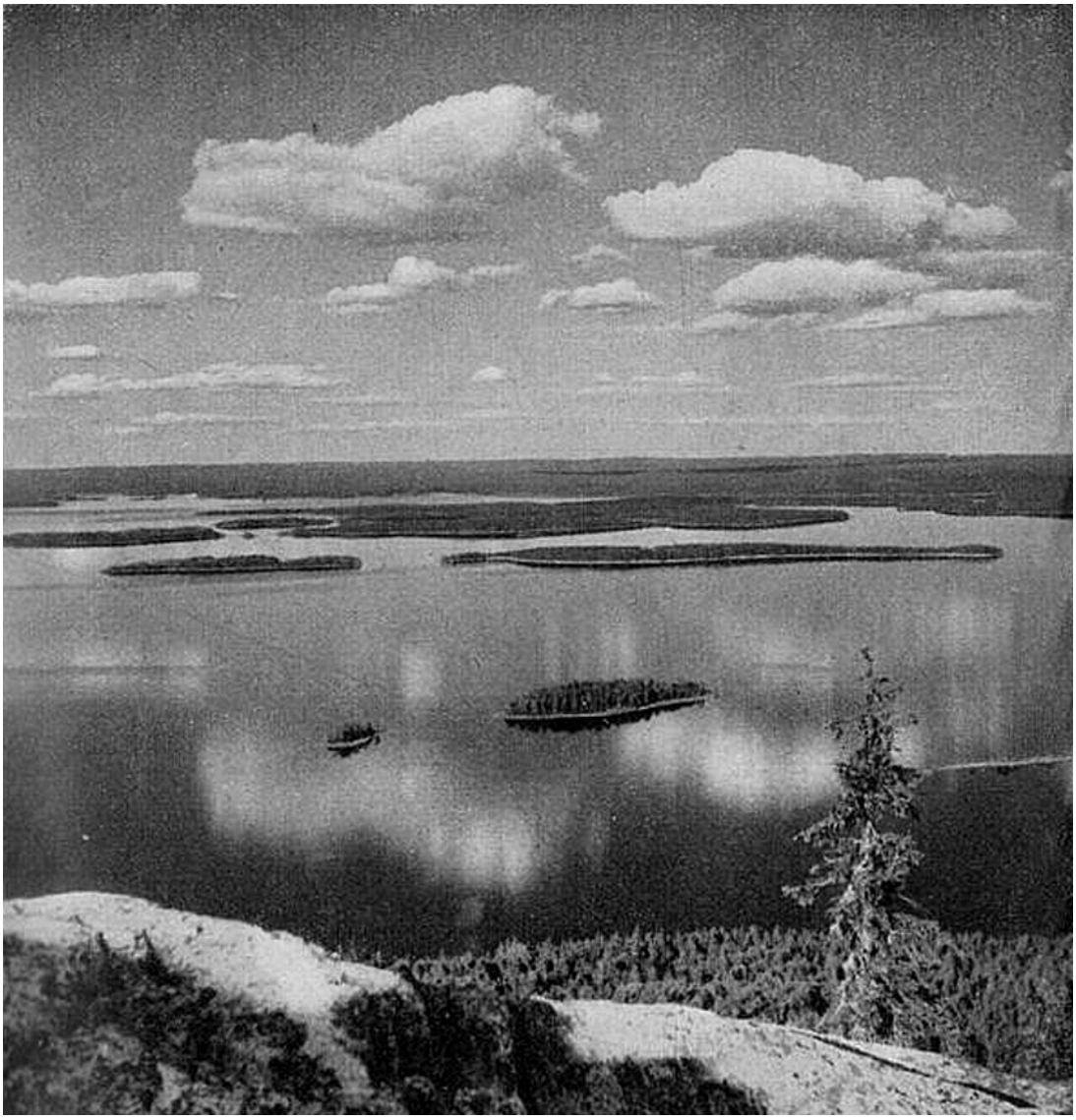
*"The untouched nature of Lapland—its vast, uninhabited plains and immeasurable swamps, these vast expanses with the undulating lines of bluish-shimmering mountains in the distance—all of this makes an overwhelming impression; meanwhile, the lonely Arctic coast of Petsamo, whose bare mountain peaks rise directly from the sea, and the low-lying, tundra-like islands where thousands of birds nest, deepen the impact of this unique landscape."*

Pines and spruces, hardened by wind and weather, bear the marks of their resistance against the force of the elements - they are like a symbol of the battle-hardened, industrious, and capable Northerner.
The humus layer of the fields is often thin, yet tireless farmerly diligence and knowledge of all advanced agricultural methods have nevertheless wrested bloom and fruit from them - how effortlessly, by contrast, southern peoples—think of the Mediterranean countries—can obtain everything necessary for life, for there nature bestows almost everything in lavish abundance.

Existence there may be more cheerful and carefree, but life, thought, feeling, and will do not develop the deep roots that form in the Nordic region through external and internal struggle; the Northerner must struggle long and hard for success, but once gained, he defends it tenaciously as his own.

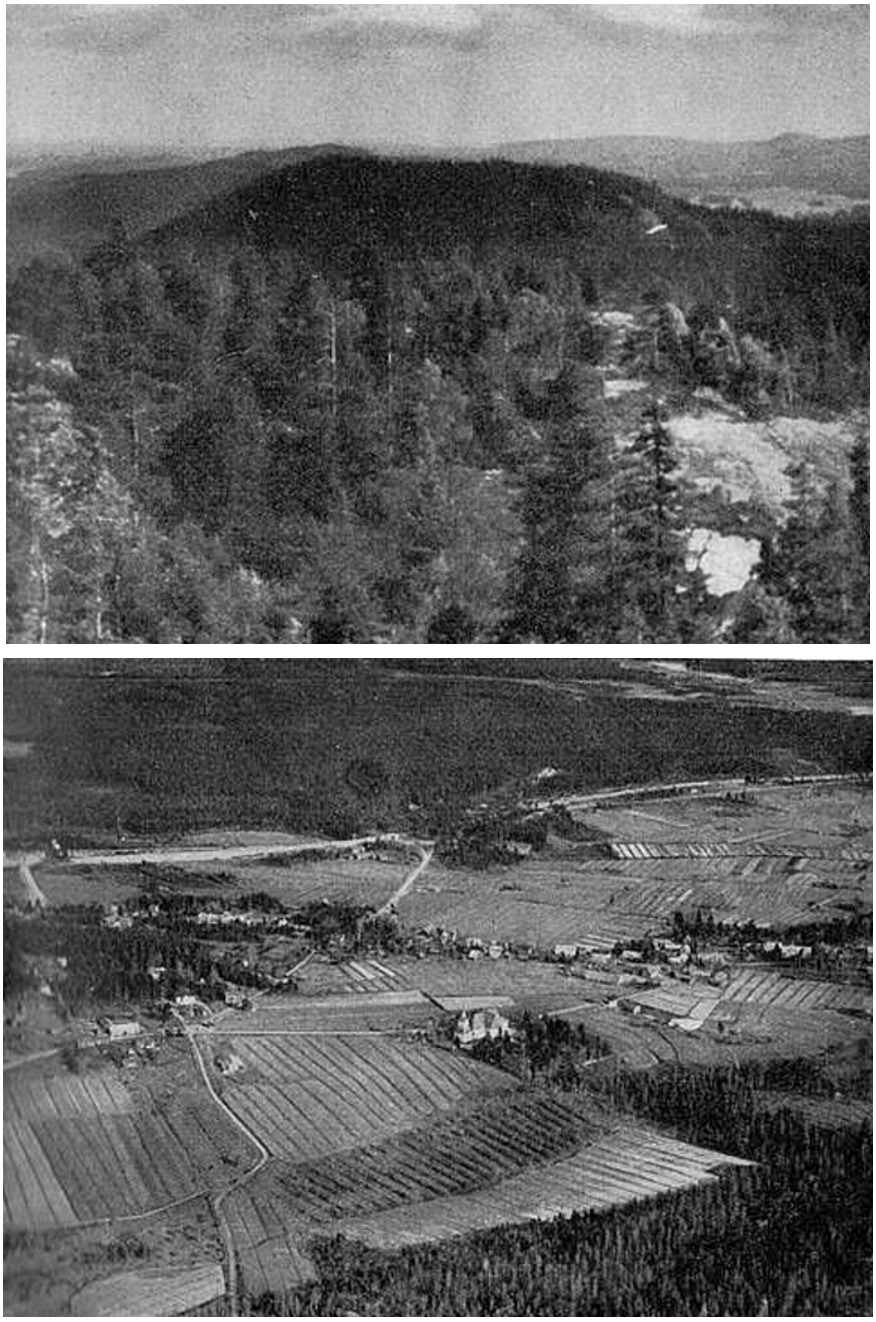


**The Midnight Sun**



**Lake landscape near Koli**

**Lake landscape of Eastern Finland**



**Nestled between lakes and woodlands, the settlements and farmlands thrive**

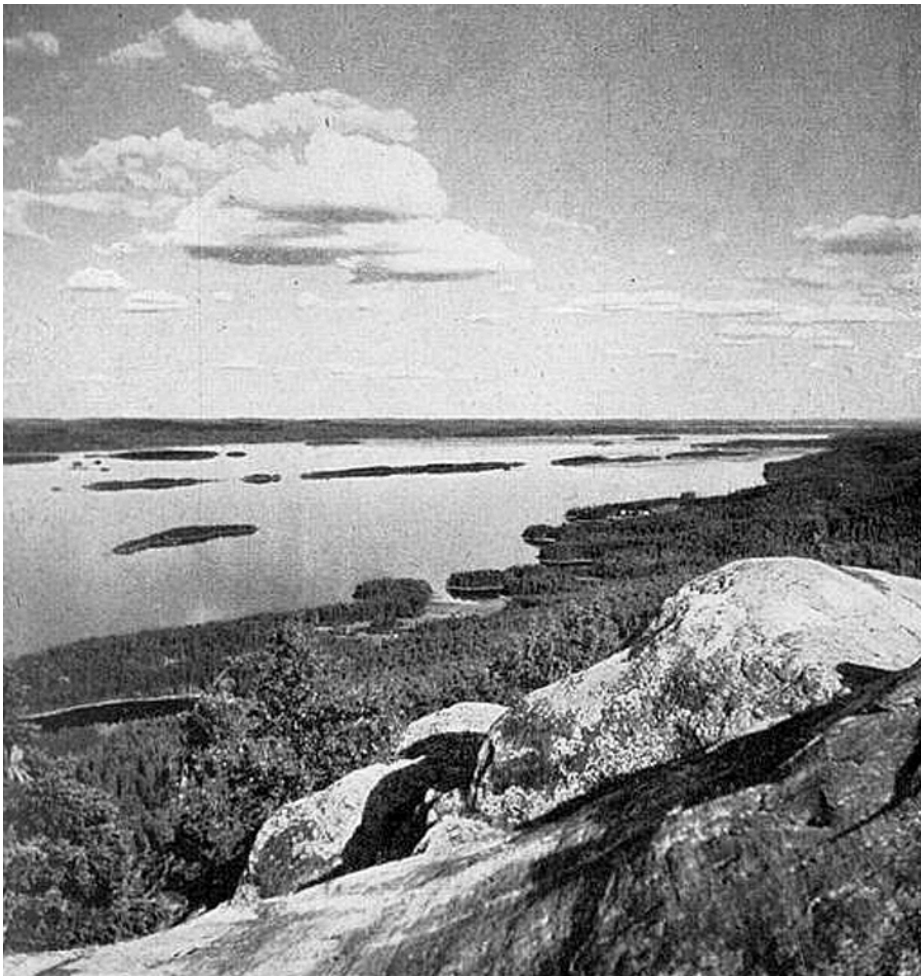
**Farmland in the southwest**

**The vastness of the land - fertile soil along the Lapua River in Southeast Ostrobothnia**

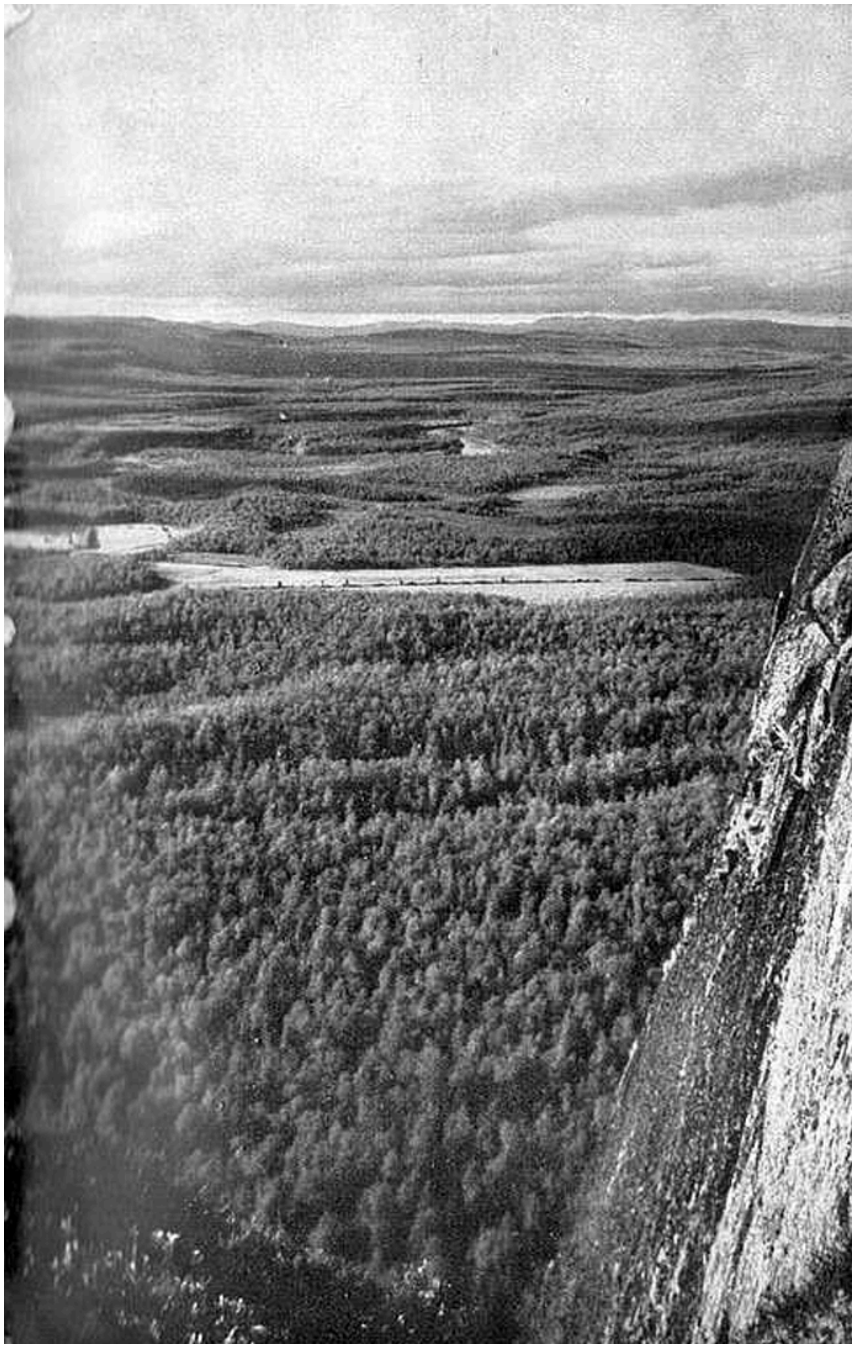
**Saimaa, one of the largest inland lakes**

**Millions of logs are floated long distances to processing plants and the Baltic Sea ports**

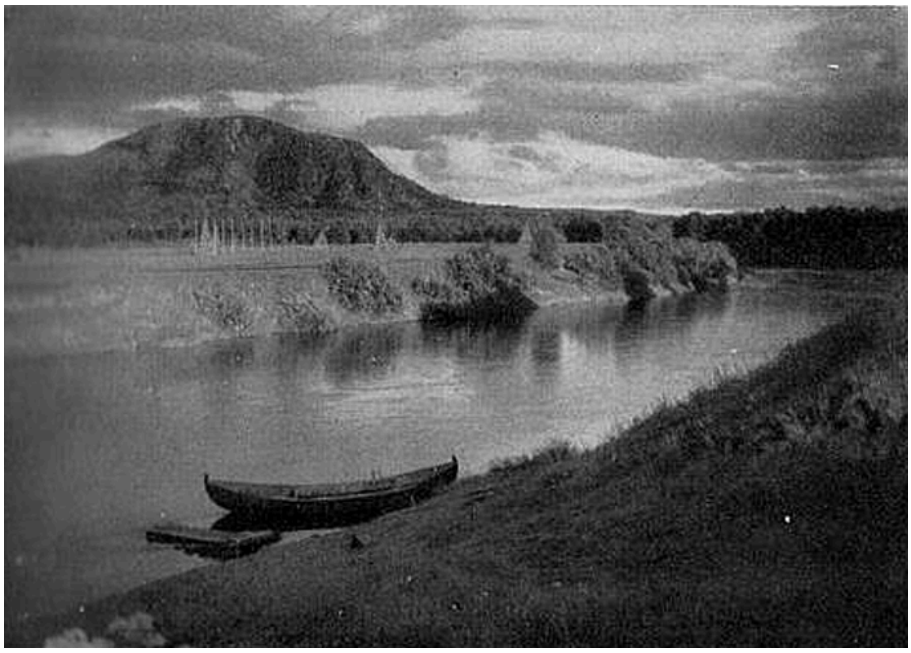
**Large paper mills process the country's "green gold"**



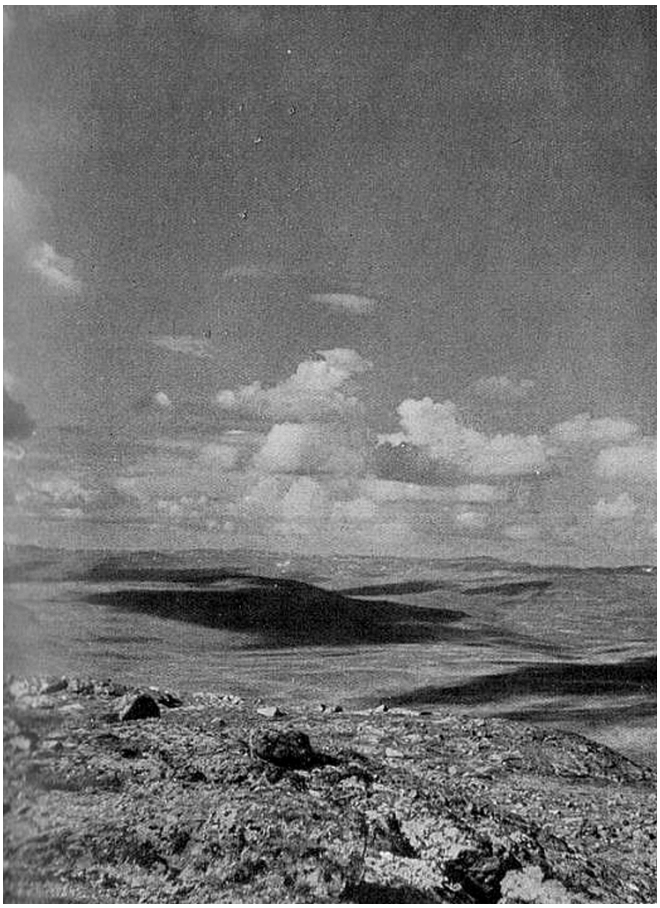
**Ancient rocks and shimmering lakes in the eastern borderlands bear the indelible traces of the Ice Age**



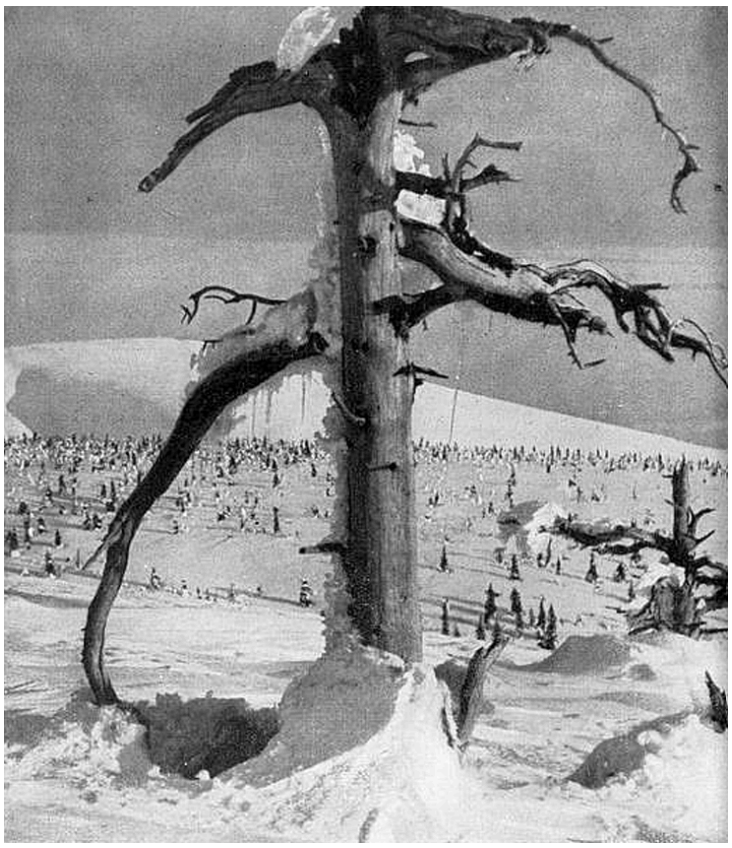
**Landscape near Petsamo, Europe's northernmost ice-free seaport**



**Birch trees beyond the Arctic Circle form a tree population as unique as it is resilient... then the landscape transitions into the Tunturi**



**The Tunturi - bare, rounded mountain ranges stretch in long, undulating lines all the way to the Arctic Ocean**



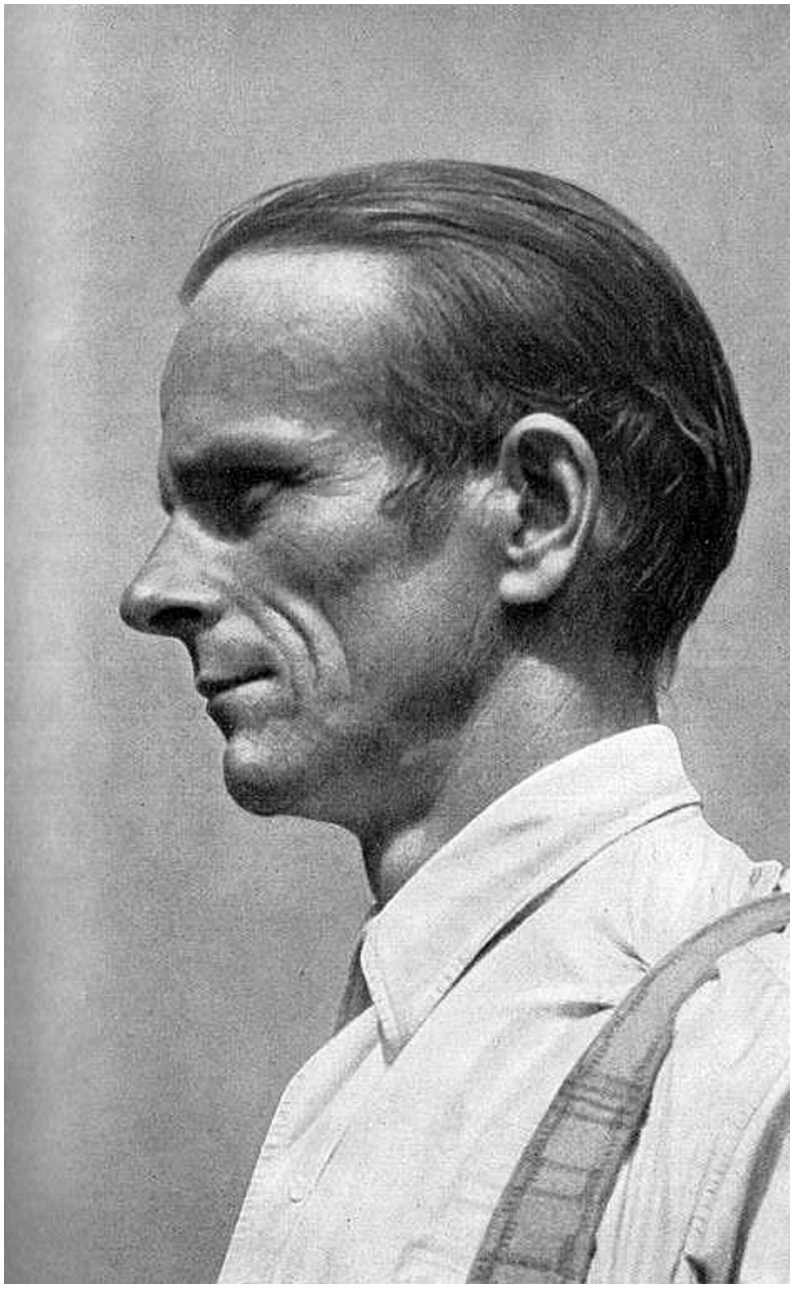
**Snow-covered landscape**

## Village Wisdom

On the shore of a lake, surrounded by high cliffs and dense forest, a stately farmer lives in solitude in a small cottage.
The man's chiseled features betray determination and keen powers of observation, while the faint smile around his mouth suggests a kind heart - in the village, people say he is a wizard, while others believe he is as educated "as a professor."
"It's nice when guests from the city come by once in a while, people you can have a conversation with," he says as he greets us.
We go into the living room: large bookcases line two walls, and on the table, piles of books, newspapers, and manuscripts are stacked high.
"Are these all yours?" I ask.
"Yes, those are my works. I've been collecting books my whole life: there are 500 here now; here is the history of the farming families in our region since the 16th century.
When I go to the village, I work in the church archives there - a lot of work. 2,000 pages are already finished; maybe someone will print it."
"Did you attend school in town?"
"No way! Back then there were few schools here; it was too far. I learned to read and write from the pastor, and then I taught myself; the books were my teachers.
Everything is in them: you just have to read and understand them properly."
I glanced at his books: there were well-known works on history, ethnology, folklore, prehistory, and geology.
I was amazed: this simple man, who speaks only a dialect and has never attended school, is engaged in scholarship and writing a history of his homeland.
"You're so smart—why do you stay here? You could have worked better in the city; your knowledge might have been of great use to you."
"No no, I'm staying here - where I was born, I also want to die.
From the soil of my homeland I draw the strength of my thoughts - what do I need fame, recognition, and profit for? The little I need to live, I build myself; that leaves enough time for reading and writing.
The city is cruel. I was there once: strangers, devoid of love, passed each other by - here in my home village, I can help many and be of use."

We spoke about many serious questions of life; evening fell, and I stayed with him overnight.
"What makes a person great? Their reason?" I asked.
"Usually not. Much depends on living conditions; even small souls can rise to great heights.
If someone is born into a position of privilege, they have more opportunities for development than a common man: a king's eldest son becomes his successor, no matter how unfit he may be.
Morals change quickly with the times - an act that is punished today may be praised tomorrow."
"What do you think about life in the big cities?"
"Life there is, despite all the glamour, poor - people have no soul and few genuine thoughts; they want influence, power, prestige; they strive for external goods with the help of their 'cleverness,' a mixture of book knowledge and self-love, or with their 'kindness,' which often does not mean an overflowing heart, but rather sentimental weakness.

Last but not least, wealth and power are closely linked; the whole of civilization is almost nothing but ignorance and the destruction of true customs, knowledge without understanding.
Through progress, bad customs have also come to us from outside, and even the rural population is endangered by the influence of the city and the lure of profit: but this will pass.
The state will also see to this, for our leaders are often the first generation in the city yet remain most deeply connected to their home farms.
A healthy people must have healthy farmers - we will never forget that the native soil is more enduring than civilization and progress, and that it alone gives us strength and joyful confidence for the future.
Where do our soldiers get their fresh courage, their resilience, their security; where do our great cities constantly draw new life from; where do families go summer after summer to rest from the toil of the struggle for existence, from the restlessness of daily life? To the countryside, to feel its blessings - here I myself have spent a rich and meaningful life, and hope that many children and the children of children will come after me."



**The Village Scholar**

**Flax cultivation, the foundation of a highly developed home-based weaving industry**

**To reclaim the stony soil, the farmer developed his own specialized tools**

## Finnish Loyalty

It is no coincidence that loyalty is considered a defining trait of the Nordic people, for just as the landscape is simple and solemn, so too are its people: unpretentious, straightforward, and energetic; a bit somber and deliberate due to their harsh lot in life, yet at the same time full of humor and, above all, loyal; their loyalty to a loved one and to their homeland is steadfast, unwavering, and almost fated.

This personal experience is meant to show how deeply tradition and the spirit of the forefathers are rooted in Finnish farmers:
Our family owned an estate in a fertile, lovely region of southern Finland, and in 1888, my grandfather, the last of us, was buried at the village's medieval church - how much has happened since then!
The serious struggles for the homeland, the World War, the Finnish-Russian War of the winter of 1939–40, and the reconstruction and flourishing of a country that had become independent - thus it came to pass that my grandfather's time and world were scarcely present to me anymore.
In 1932, during my military service, my regiment was stationed not far from the ancestral home of my family's mountain pastures, and on one free afternoon, I suddenly decided to drive over there, with two comrades who wanted to accompany me.
Perhaps there were still farmers alive who had known my grandfather? I thought in particular of old Saari, about whom my father had written to me - his family had served on our estate for many generations.
At the entrance to the village, we saw an old man sitting on the bridge railing, smoking a pipe and gazing thoughtfully into the distance; he was already 80 years old, if not older, but he was as sturdy as a tree with roots so deep in the earth that no storm could uproot him.
I walked up to him and asked if a farmer named Saari was still alive, and if so, where we could find him - in response, his eyes, set deep beneath his white eyebrows, cast a searching glance at me.
His face hardened at the sight of strangers, and he looked at all three of us with suspicion:
"What do you want from him?"
"We just want to visit him and talk to him."
"About what?" the harsh voice growled.
"Well, since you absolutely must know! My name is Grünhagen, and I'd like to know if there are still farmers living here who knew my grandfather."
As if a dark curtain had fallen from his face, he beamed—yes, he beamed with genuine joy.
"Good heavens," the words tumbled from his lips, "I—I am Saari, and you—you are from the Grönhagens! To think I'd live to see such a thing! We thought you'd all died, since none of you had come here - how happy my wife will be! Come, come!"
He led us home, almost skipping with joy, and when we arrived, tears of joy welled up in his wife's eyes as well: the longer she looked at me, the more freely they flowed.
We had to take a seat and talk with the old man while his wife set the round table in the "parlor" - to my surprise however, I saw only three place settings on the table—for my comrades and for me.
"And you? Won't you eat too?"
"Oh, no. We'll just watch and be happy if you enjoy it."
We didn't need to be asked twice as we ate with a hearty appetite, as the old couple sat side by side, rocking back and forth and watching us cheerfully.

The news of my arrival had spread like wildfire through the village thanks to old Mother Saari, and it wasn't long before a good dozen old farmers had gathered, all of whom had known my grandfather - rough, aged hands reached out to me warmly, and clear tears of joy streamed down the faces of the honest, warm-hearted elders.

Each had brought along some memento of my ancestors: carefully preserved photographs, clippings from newspapers and magazines, in which they gazed with pride at one of "their" Grönhagens.

The elders sat all around me, and despite my pleas, I could not persuade them to take a seat at the same table; meanwhile, following an old custom, they offered me food and drink, the best they had.

The meal was like a feast - everything was given to me because the same blood flowed through me, as it also did through the man they had loved and respected in their youth.

"And now, young man, let's go to your grandfather's grave."

Before me was not the grave of a forgotten man - the granite stone was polished, and new, bright flowers grew all around it; I could not hide my shock.

"Saari, who has tended to the grave?"

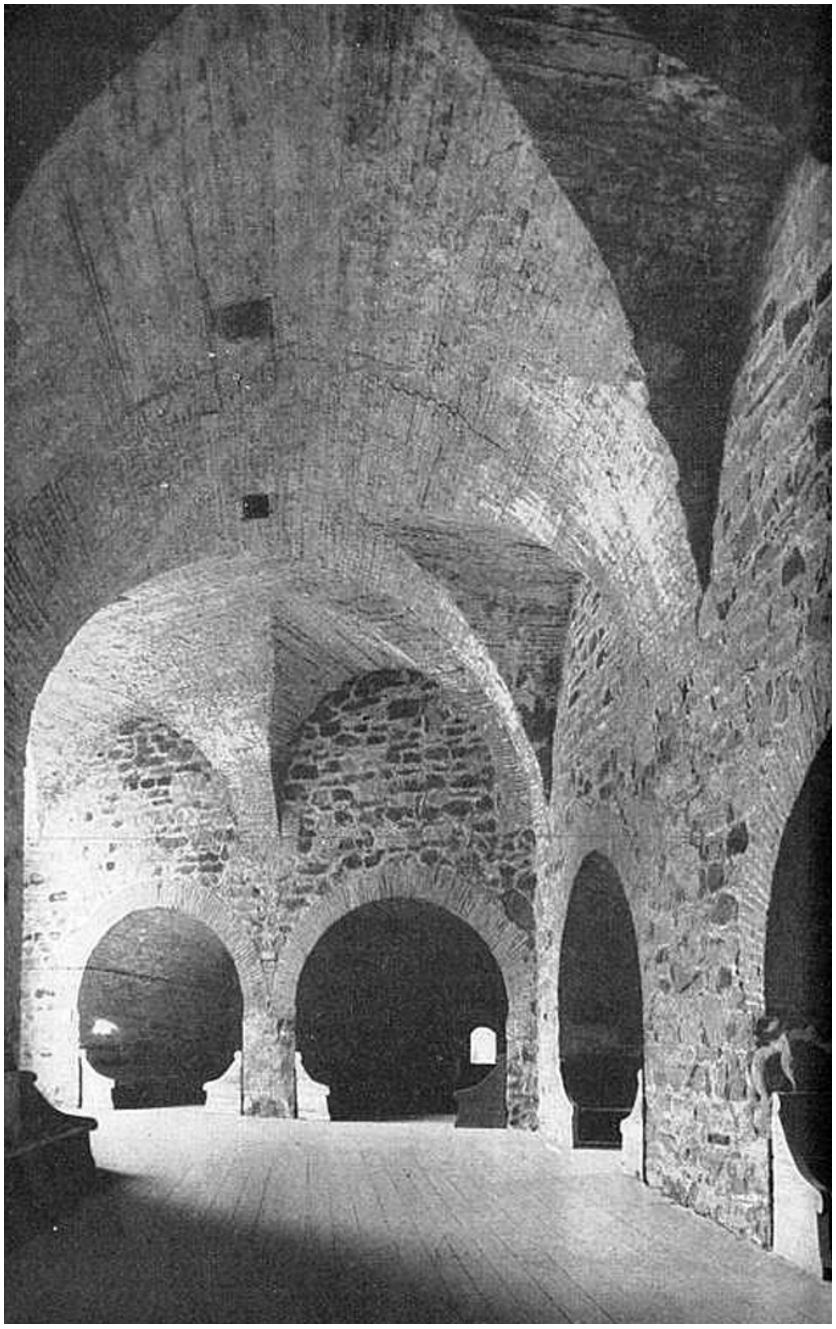
The old man looked at me, and you could tell he didn't understand the question.

"Who takes care of it? We do, my wife and I, of course - my wife washes and polishes the stone every spring, and every Sunday we bring fresh flowers."

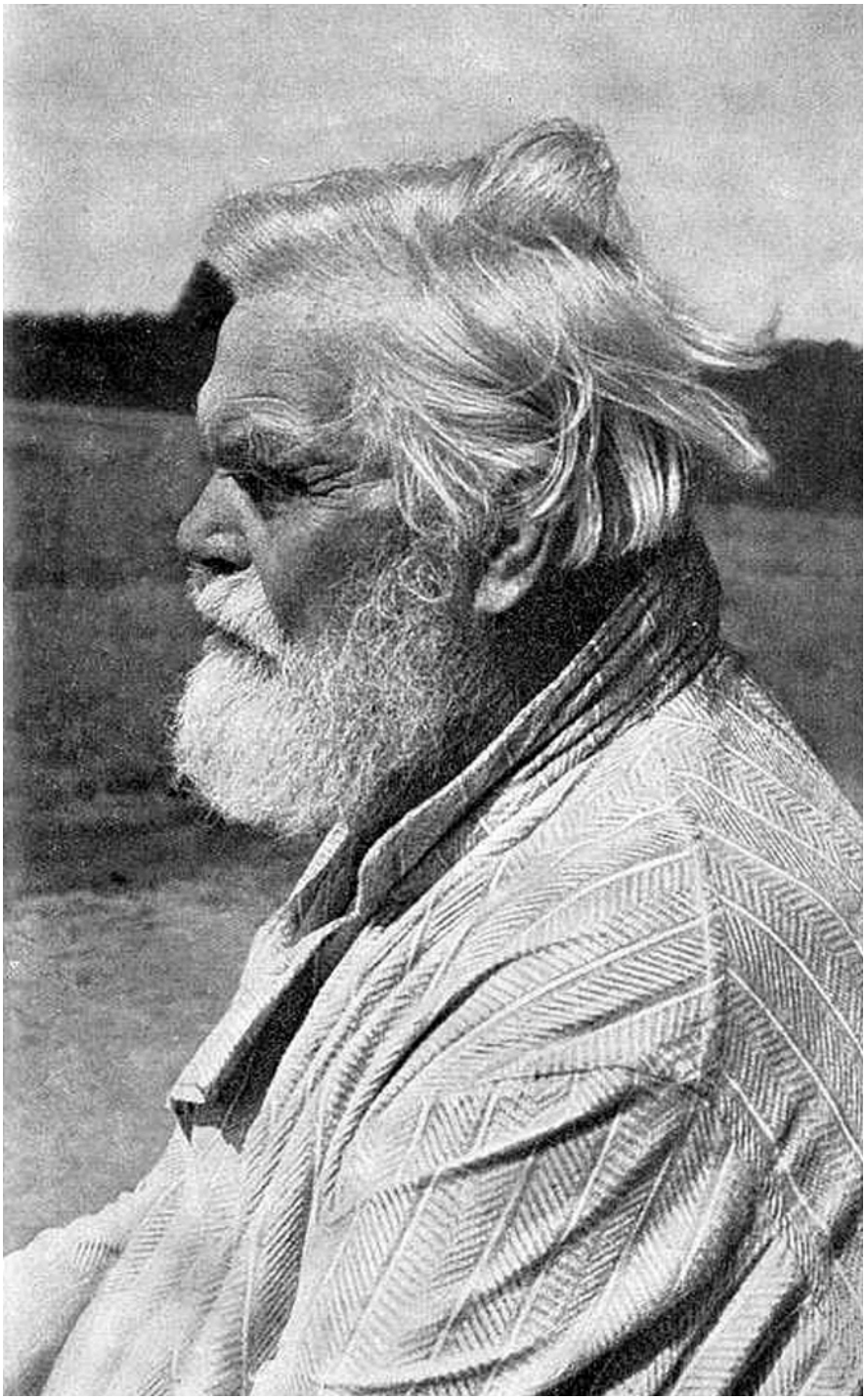
My grandfather had died in 1888, and since the turn of the century, no one in the family had been able to tend the grave: thirty years had passed.

I felt ashamed - should I thank him? Saari wouldn't have understood, for his deed seemed so natural to him that there was no point in talking about it; I simply shook the old man's hand in silence—his and his wife's—and promised to return.

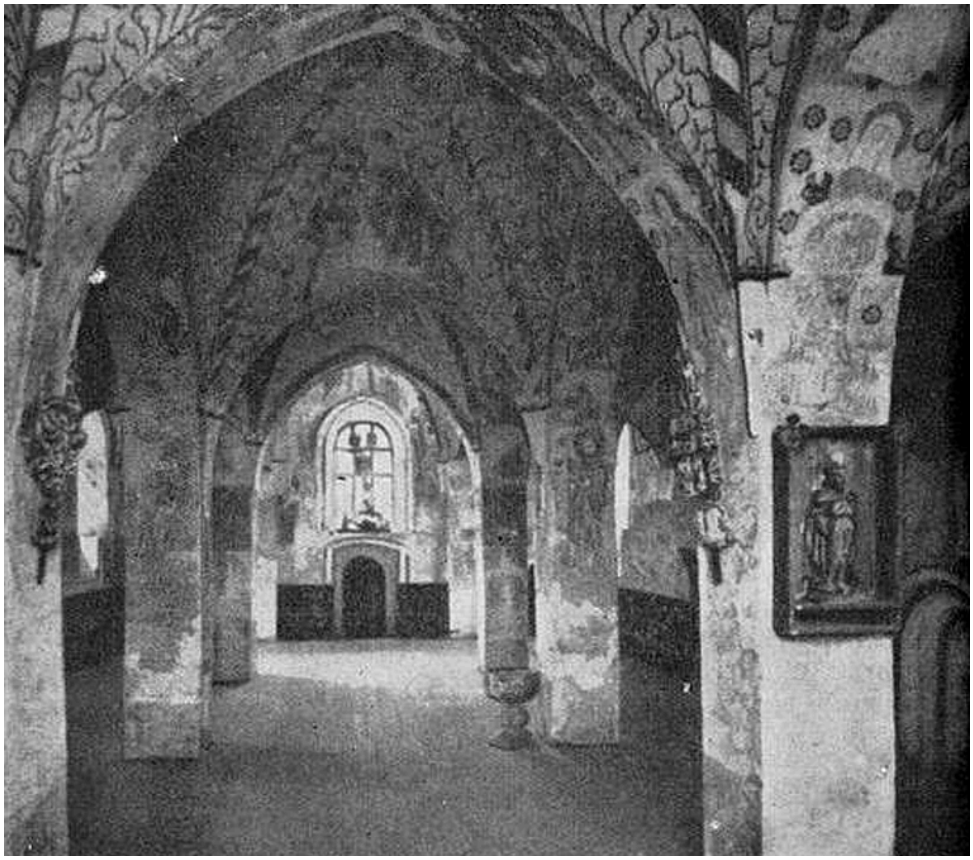
A few years later, the faithful servant returned home to the great host, and next to my grandfather's grave now stands a simple stone with the inscription: Veikko Saari.



**Olavinlinna - fortified castle in the East**



**The old faithful servant**



**Folk murals adorn the medieval church in Hattula**

## The Sauna

It is Saturday, and peaceful wisps of smoke rise from all the bathhouses.
The saunas are small wooden huts built next to the farmstead or as close to the lake as possible, almost with greater care and love than the main house.
With a sense of trepidation, the newcomer walks with the host along the narrow path that leads through woods and rocks from the house down to the lake, to the mysteriously dark little hut: will he be able to withstand the heat; won't the darkness of the room, which has only a small window, seem eerie to him?
And at the same time, on this peaceful, quiet summer evening at the side of his Finnish friend, he feels a reverent awe toward the sauna, the sacred place of the Finns since time immemorial - here people were born, here they began their married life, were healed of illnesses, and laid out before burial.

The summer evening is still, and the trees do not move; only in the mirror-clear lake does one hear, from time to time, the splashing of fish and the cry of a night bird on the opposite shore.
Somewhere far out on the water, a lone boat is rowing—one cannot see it, but one can hear the regular strokes of the oars and the voices of the people that carry across the water, as if they were very close by.
The air is cool, and in the sauna's antechamber, the guest sees fresh birch twigs lying on the bench; Kaija, the light mead, stands on the table, and clean linen towels hang on the wall.
Behind the door lies the mysterious sauna: something is hissing there.
One undresses, and the host opens the door to the unknown, whereupon a wave of hot steam hits the newcomer; a large stove is the centerpiece of the room.
The fire has already died down, and only the black, glowing stones lying on the stove hiss when a drop of water falls on them; meanwhile, large buckets filled with hot and cold water stand ready, and the ladle lies nearby.
Steps lead up to the roof of the hut, and up there on a wooden floor, sweat benches are covered with white cloths - it is there that the host asks his guest to climb up.
Up there, it is almost unbearably hot, but both still lie down there and begin to tell stories to each other, with interruptions in between as the host goes back downstairs once more to throw a splash of water onto the glowing stones, as hot steam rises with a hiss.

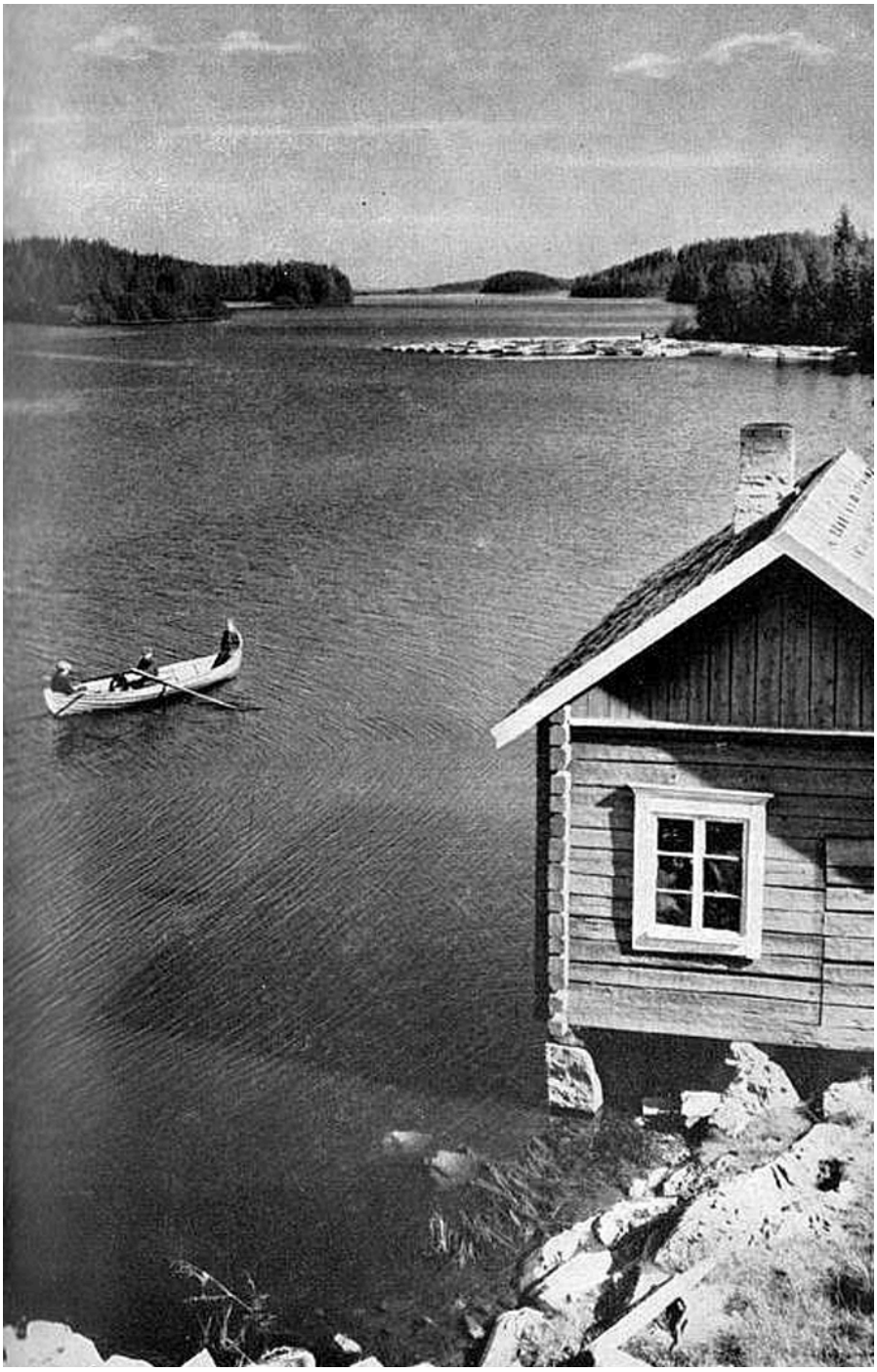
High above, the guest sits enveloped in thick clouds of steam, which envelops him pleasantly until a slight dizziness rises to the newcomer's head; he breathes in the scent of wood fire and birch twigs, and soon, when it becomes too hot for him, he hurries back downstairs, yet the host laughs and urges him back -
"The good spirits of the hearth and the house—yes, Väinämöinen himself, the hero of the Kalevala—will protect you," he says.
Gradually, the stranger grows accustomed to the heat, beats his body with birch twigs, and soon feels wonderfully free and light.
His body is drenched in sweat: everything unhealthy and impure leaves his body; then he washes himself with the warm water and goes into the anteroom to drink some Kaija.
"Take a dip in the lake," the innkeeper invites him.
Outside it is quiet and cool, and the water is crystal clear... and cold after the hot bath - and yet, it feels wonderfully good and refreshing to swim in the dark evening water.
Irregular waves ripple across the previously smooth surface of the lake in ever-widening circles; then it's back to the hot sauna.

One more delicious, fresh drink, and then it's time to head up the forest path to the house at the end of the day.
Greetings from the sauna are brought to friends, and we sit peacefully together at the especially festively set table or by the hearth fire, chatting about the past, old legends, and fairy tales, or making plans for the future.

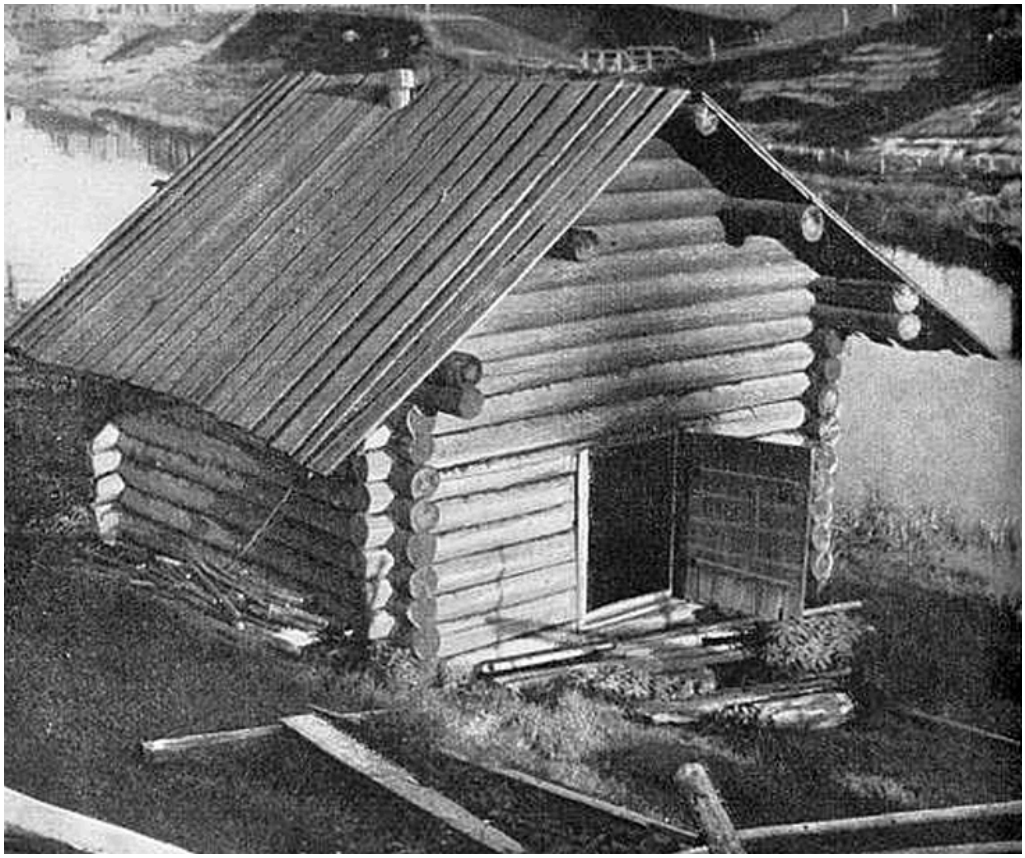
Purity encompasses both body and soul: the sauna is a wondrous place, and no Finn would want to miss bathing in the sauna at least once a week.
No blasphemous word may be spoken there - according to popular belief, illnesses are prevented and overcome by the purifying power of water and fire:

*Hail to the steam, hail to the heat:*
*Where, then, might one find the steam?*
*Where might one draw near the warmth?*
*It rises from the stone of the stove.*
*From the moss-covered floor of the bathhouse.*
*To grant health,*
*To build peace.*

For a few more days, one lives in the magic of the memory of the sauna, and for the rest of the week, one waits with growing joy for Saturday.



**The sauna — the fountain of life**



**Smoke sauna — the archetype of a Finnish bathhouse**

**End of the workday - women on their way to the sauna**

## The Healer

In the beautiful, wild countryside of North Karelia, nestled among the mountains, lived Anna Sorsa, a healer endowed with the gift of clairvoyance and all manner of special powers; when she died, her abilities passed to her son Ipu, who runs a popular folk "healing practice."
We cycle through the countryside to visit him, where a low, dilapidated wooden cottage with narrow windows does little to invite us inside.
Two men sit on benches in the single large room: one of them, a fat, ugly fellow, cap on his head, smokes in a casual posture, while the second, thin, tall, and in a short-sleeved shirt, keeps him company in silence. On the table stands a vial of white liquid, where a chicken feather lies beside it, and a knife—the puukko—is stuck in the northern wall.
"Good afternoon."
No answer; we take a seat.
Silence… no one speaks… you can hear the clock: tick… tock, tick… tock…
"It's hot outside," my friend says.
"Yeah, it's hot," replies the skinny one, glaring at us.
Then silence again.
The fat man smokes his yellow cigarette and spits on the floor from time to time, and his feet shift nervously back and forth - it's clear that he's very unhappy about our arrival.
"We're traveling and want to see the world," my friend tries to restart the conversation.
"By bicycle?" asks the fat man.
"Yes."
"Mm."
Nothing again - this goes on for about half an hour.
I offer them both a cigarette.
"Thanks."

The clock strikes three, and not a word is said - we get the distinct impression that we're not allowed to talk about the purpose of our visit and have to leave the house immediately.
Then my friend notices that the skinny one has a red hand:
"Are you sick?"
"My hand is burning; I was in the hospital in Oulu for ten days and in Nivala for ten days, but it only got worse."
"Of course—doctors can't do much."
"Yeah, yeah, they take a lot of money, you have to stay in the hospital for a long time, and you still don't get better."
"There's a woman here who could surely cure something like that: her name is Anna Sorsa."
"Yes, but she's already passed away," said the fat man. "It's a shame that such valuable people die."
"Everyone has to die."
"But knowledge dies too - young people today don't want to know anything about the experience of the old."
"Some don't, others do," said the fat man.
"Where did Anna Sorsa live?"
"Here in this house - I'm her son, after all," replied the fat man, spitting on the ground again.

“Don’t you know how your mother healed people? People talk about her everywhere, even down south.”
“People talk, people always talk…”
“I came from the north, 80 kilometers from the railroad, and from there you still have to take the train and the bus; they speak about her there too,” says the skinny man.
“If you’ve come from that far, you’re bound to get well.”

Then a new person enters the room: it is an old man who can barely walk.
He looks tired and sick, and without saying a word, he takes a seat; the silence lasts quite a while again.
“By bike, too?” asks Ipu.
“Yes, I can’t walk on foot; 20 kilometers is too much—I can’t even walk 200 meters.”
“What’s wrong with you?”
“I have sciatica—it hurts a lot, sciatica.”
“Since when?”
“For two years; sometimes it’s so bad that I have to lie down.”
“It’ll get better,” says Ipu.
“He had sciatica too,” says my friend, pointing at me, “he was very sick.”
Now I have to play the sick man, and the old man turns to me eagerly and asks:
“How long were you sick? Is it better now?”
“Yes… it lasted over a year; now in the summer it’s better, but in the winter I still feel it.”
“Me too, now I can walk a little, but in the winter I have to lie down or sit.”
“Did you go to the doctor?”
“Yes... but it didn’t help; then I went to the sauna, and that’s when it got better.”
“That’s what I always say—you have to go to the sauna and try that: the sauna is a sacred place. Who helped you?”
“An old woman from Salmi; with birch and hot stones.”
The old man becomes cheerier and hope shines from his light blue eyes - I feel sorry for him, since I still have to play the role of a traveling farmhand who was healed by a “witch.”

Ipu just watches and smiles; he doesn’t speak at all now, just spits and swings his thick legs more vigorously.
The gaunt man stands up, takes two bottles wrapped in newspaper from Ipu, and leaves without saying goodbye.
“I need to drink some water,” says the old man and goes out into the yard with my friend.
Now the two of us are alone, the “witch doctor” and I - we look into each other’s eyes for a long time without speaking: he has eerie eyes, small, green ones behind which you can see nothing, eyes that are always smiling, yet expressionless.
Now we, too, go out in front of the house, but there, too, the man says nothing.
I ask his permission to film his house and he grants it; when we return with the cameras, the old man meets us in the doorway with a bottle under his arm, which the witch doctor had sold him.
Shortly afterward, a little girl comes by and brings some old pieces of iron, which Ipu carefully hides; a few minutes later, a woman then arrives, and so as not to disturb her, we go out into the yard where I film the house and the surroundings; through the window, I see Ipu bandaging the woman.
Finally, I manage to film the man in his courtyard, as well as his 35-year-old horse, which he needs for special purposes - unfortunately, we cannot find out what these “special” purposes are.

Ultimately, we have achieved nothing: we were merely witnesses to this man's great popularity and his mysterious reputation; during the three hours we were there, seven patients visited him.

**Traditional folk medicine is still practiced among the Karelians**

## Miron-Aku

Myths and fairy tales can still speak powerfully to the hearts of people today—but what are we to make of those strange men and women, still to be found in secluded parts of Finland, who seek to fathom all the events that take place between heaven and earth, where reason and rigid materialistic views lose their validity?
One must understand that, for these people, everything natural possesses an immediate reality that captures and fills their very being; their knowledge has not undergone the changes of the centuries, but their thinking and feeling are directly connected, through the finest threads, to all living forces.
The essence of the animate and inanimate world lies clearly before them: forest and spring, animal and flower do not exist outside of them, but merge within them; in their dreams, they sense the growth and becoming of things and deeds even before they take visible form, and where night has already fallen for the five senses, they see and feel everything in brightness.

Past, present, and future close into a solid circle for them - once they were the sages, the “priests” of the people as the elders of their tribe; no important matter of the village or the clan was decided without first seeking their healing and empowering counsel, for they understood the language of animals and plants, which was the essence of divine nature and their own world.
Over the centuries this office was lost, and the sages withdrew ever deeper into the forests and concealed their knowledge from the eyes of the curious - true, the appearance of the elders—their serious and kind eyes, their calm and confident movements, and their resonant, penetrating words—commanded the reverence of the young, but it became increasingly difficult to understand them, for the world had changed, growing more distant from the forces of heaven and earth, entangled in the human endeavors of the 20th century.

Human desires and hopes remain fundamentally the same - only their form changes.
Will happiness come to me as I imagine it? People will ask this question again and again, and to find the answer, some have developed the most colorful practices to predict the future with water and alcohol, divining rods and pendulums, often enough with dubious integrity, for a good prediction brings a handsome reward.
Unlike those simple fortune-tellers, the old Miron-Aku in Salmi was different - she was one of those women gifted with the finest inner sense, who sought out the secrets of nature and life, and when she—rarely—spoke to others of her knowledge, when she tried to heal with herbs and earth, stones and incantations, with the steam of the sauna and her own organic power, she was convinced that she was doing good and bowing to no false god.
The strong love and kindness in a simple heart like Miron-Aku’s, along with her natural confidence, give a sense of why many farmers firmly believe in her healing and helping powers.

Far from the major roads in Karelia lies a stretch of sparsely cultivated land, not far from the Russian border.
Simple wooden huts are scattered across the vast expanses, and those who live here renounce all the joys of life - a person must possess extraordinary qualities to maintain a joyful heart, shining eyes, and overflowing strength here: Miron-Aku was able to do so.

On a hill in the middle of the forest, not far from the cemetery, stands the small hut where I had many serious conversations with the old woman shortly before her death.
“She’s a ‘witch,’ don’t go to her,” some suspicious farmers warned me when I set out to visit her for the first time - nevertheless, I made a timid and expectant knock on the door.
No answer - therefore, I turned the doorknob and stepped inside.
The small room was sparsely furnished, with the narrow bench, made of rough-hewn wood, serving as Miron-Aku’s bed; the hard bed had no sheets, and old skirts, cloths with faded colors, torn by the branches of the trees and bushes in the grove, lay scattered about.
By the window, on the table, stood bright flowers in simple pots; a warm fire burned in the hearth.

The old woman was not at home, and I was just about to leave when I heard a deep voice speaking somewhat rapidly in the nearby forest; with this, I decided to walk toward the sound.
Among the trees, a female figure was bent over, strong and agile, gathering mushrooms into her basket and talking incessantly to herself: one could observe her unobtrusively.
Suddenly she raised her head, looked at me intently, and came toward me - her bright green eyes had a piercing gaze, and one sensed that she was reading my soul: she was a being who, in a long life, had learned to see the essence of things.
Then she spoke... and her deep voice had a beautiful, full tone; an indescribable power radiated from the old woman.
“Three days ago, you came to me in my sleep and wanted to take my secrets; since then, I have been ill and will soon die. What do you want from me? Go away and never return.”
“But Miron-Aku, I mean you no harm, I only want to speak with you; they say you are a wise woman.”
“Is that so? I am a witch,” she replied dismissively.
“Why are you a witch? Are you evil?”
“I don’t know. That’s what people say—the doctors and priests who have caused me so much suffering.”
“Why are you angry with them?”
“Because they know so little, yet think they alone can help people.”
“Why do they know so little? They studied, didn’t they?”
“Studied? Where? In schools? Yes, yes, but how old are schools, anyway? There weren’t any in the old days, yet people were often wiser than they are today; the art of healing is also older than all academic knowledge.
Teachers didn’t invent the art of healing: it has been here as long as humans have lived on Earth. We have learned from nature - why don’t people believe that one could also heal with the powers of nature?
I have restored many people to health when they knew of no other help - there is, for example, a young lad who was epileptic, had been to many doctors, spent a lot of money there, and no one could free him from the agonizing seizures: then he came to me.
I bathed him in the sauna twenty-one times, which is hard for me in this heat because I’m already over 90 years old: now he’s healthy.
But what good does it do? Now he laughs at me and doesn’t even invite me in for coffee; that could make one angry, but not many are so ungrateful.
Never mind - come into the parlor for some coffee.”
It is a time-honored custom of the Finnish people to offer coffee to a guest as soon as they truly welcome them, and while ground coffee was apparently an unattainable luxury for Miron-Aku, given her poverty,

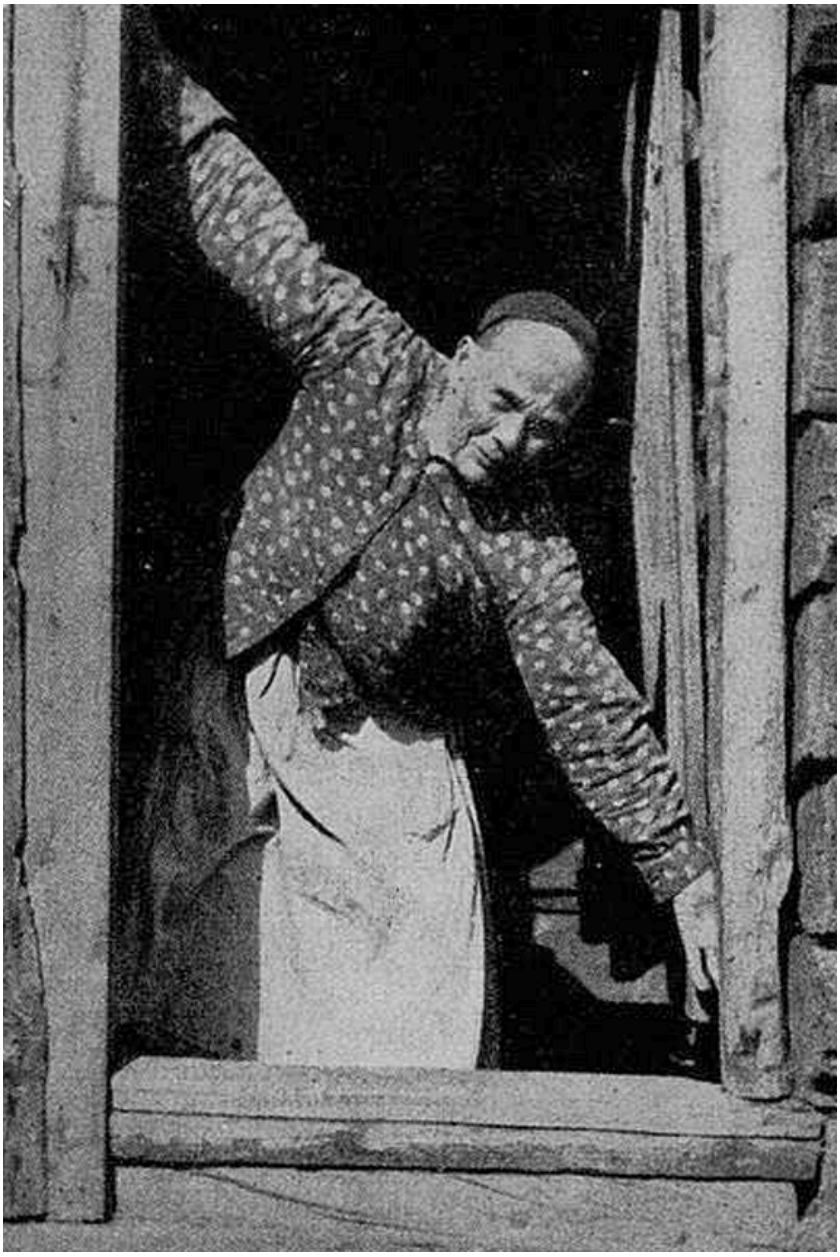
she prepared me a black brew made from charred roots she had gathered in the forest; I had to drink two full cups of this “nectar” and praise it heartily.

The conversation grew livelier and livelier, and soon I realized that the old woman could laugh kindly and warmly.
“Tell me, Miron-Aku, how you came by your knowledge.”
“I have been learning for many years - but not in school: here in the forest I heard birds sing, saw flowers bloom, and watched the sun and moon move across the sky; I saw how everything is in God’s hands.
My aunt was a wise woman who told me many things, but she died when I was still small, and while I was able to inherit from her the longing for knowledge, I had not yet acquired the knowledge itself.
Then there was a Lapp[1] here, a wise Lapp, who taught me - by the time I was 25, I had become a Lapp myself.”
“Why are you a Lapp?”
“Because I took on his knowledge.”
“Was he a Lapp from Lapland?”
“No, he was born here, like me, but he received his knowledge from another Lapp.”
“So does the knowledge come from the Lapps at all?”
“The knowledge comes from God, and the Lapps learned it from the trees and springs, from the earth and the air - anyone can become a Lapp if they have love and a clear mind and want to help people—even you.”
“Yes, but tell me, Miron-Aku, many believe that you are in league with the devil.”
“I am, indeed, but he is not the embodiment of evil, as people claim, for with his help, I do much good - he is, after all, my god, the old Finnish god.
The Christian god came to us from abroad, and we did not want to and could not give up our familiar god, so they turned him into the devil, and gradually he became the devil.
The few who hold fast to the old faith are said to be witches and evil, wicked people - just think about it: if he were evil, he could only do evil, but through him, I have been able to bring much help and joy - therefore, our old god lives, and he is good.”
For Miron-Aku, the voice and power of nature were the mirror of God, and from the roots of existence flowed insights and gifts that gave her life, amidst the greatest poverty, security and inner fulfillment.
When I wanted to visit her again the following summer, death—which she had never feared—had taken her away.

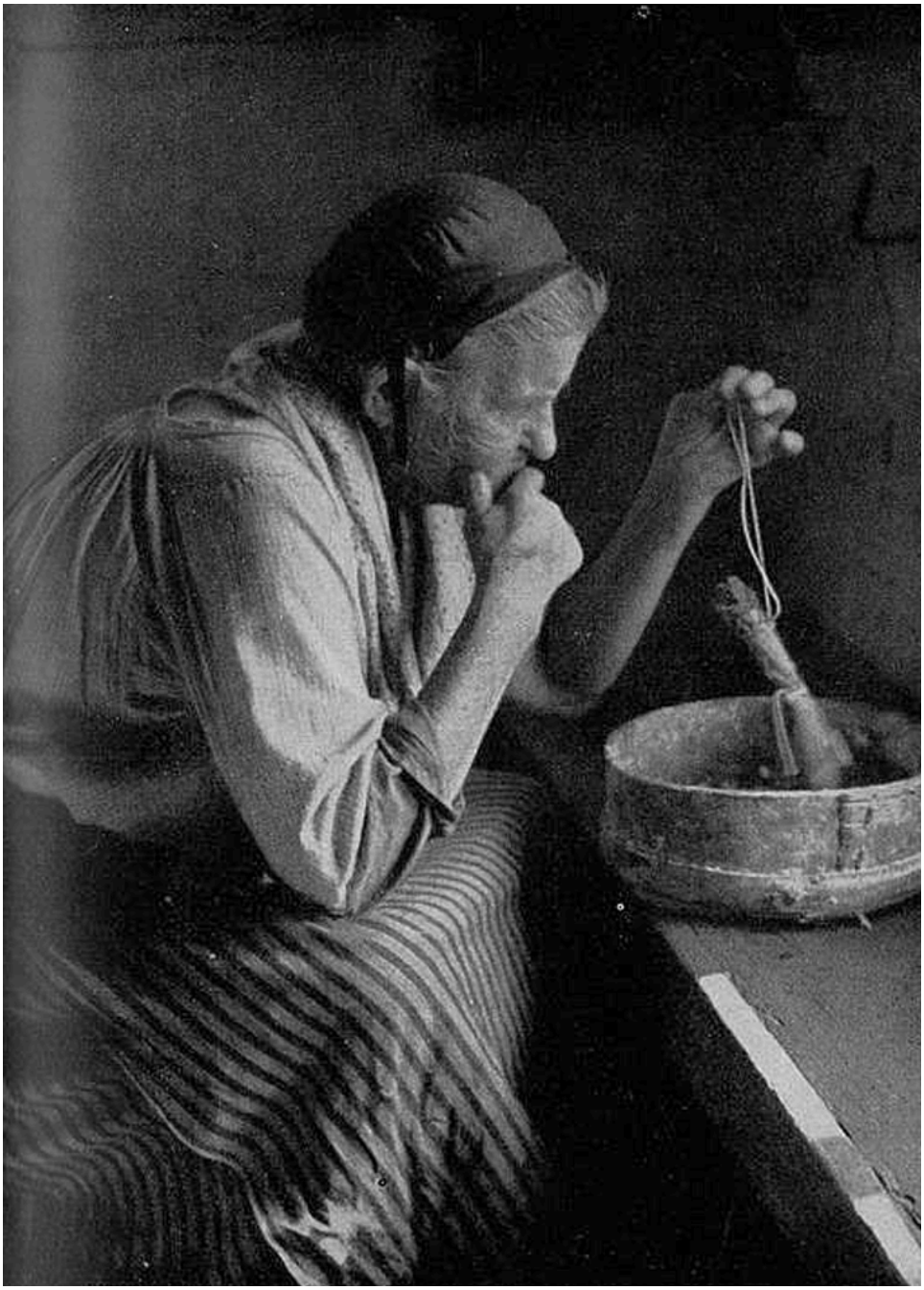
[1] Referring to a member of the indigenous Sámi people. - The Translator

**Miron-Aku, one of the last guardians of the ancient customs of Finland**

**Land scarcity forced her to cultivate increasingly barren fields**



**For Miron-Aku, the house is not only her dwelling, but also the home of her ancestors' souls, whom she greets in the picture**



**Her neighbors believes she can predict the future with her pendulum**

## On the Finnish Faith

The Finnish people were convinced of the divine origin of the world: they sensed divine powers in every tree, in every patch of earth, in the water and the air, in the movement of the stars, in life and in death. Good spirits, the Haltia, made the realms of the earth their home, and sacrifices were offered to both beloved deceased ancestors and to the life-giving spirits and forces.
As sites for sacrifice, they chose sunny groves, fresh springs, and strange stones, in the midst of the forest or in the fields; through rhythmic words, sounds, and movements, the sacrificers brought superhuman processes into being through both appearance and action.
The community of clans and settlements gathered under the open sky around the elder, the wise one - a sense of divine power dwell within him, for he understands the inner language of nature; his knowledge had nothing to do with reason or intellect, but came from the cosmos and became one with the core of his being.

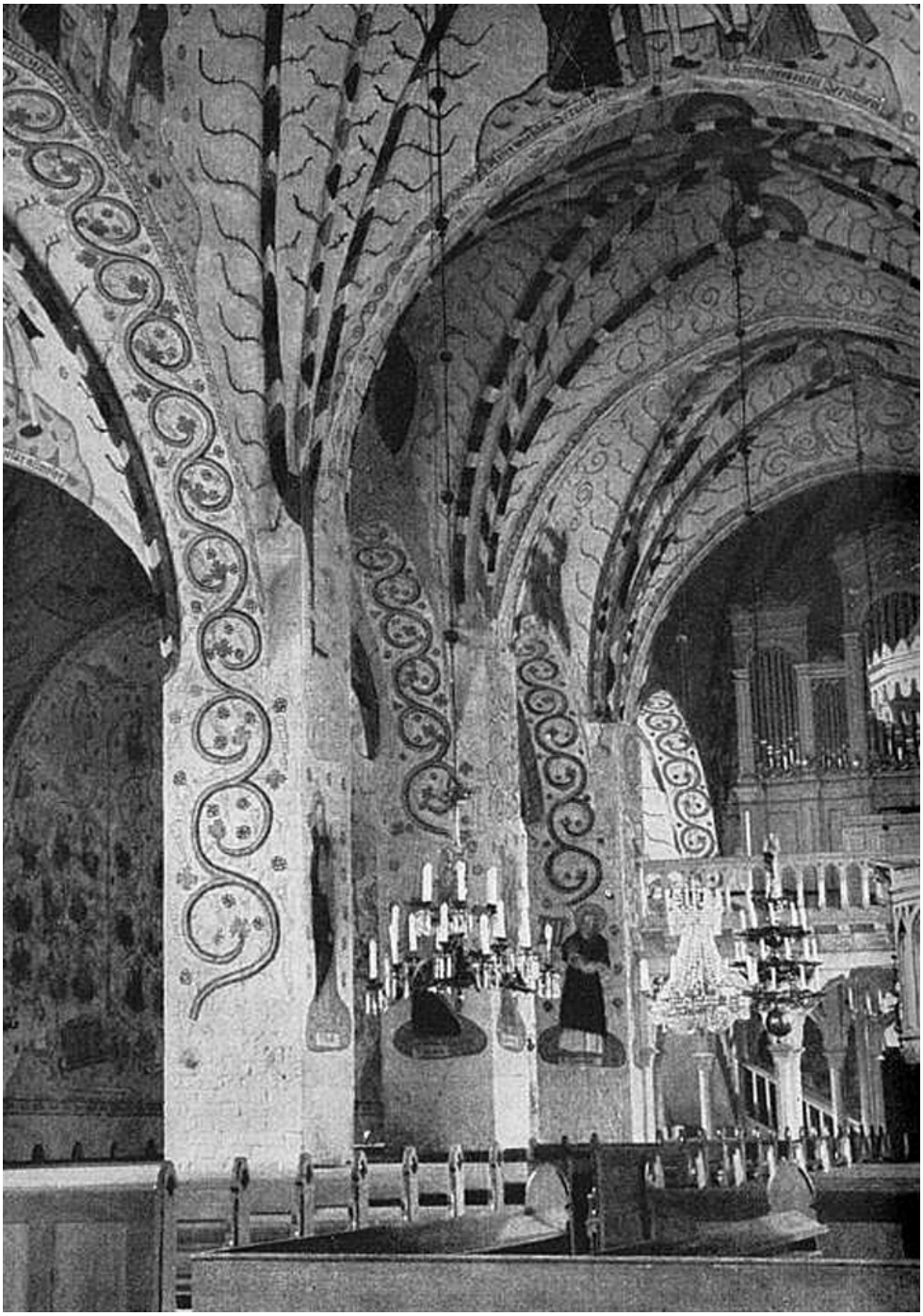
Into this religious world of the Finnish tribes, the First Crusade—organized by the Pope himself—was launched from Sweden in 1155; the westernmost tribe, the Finns proper, adopted Christianity, and in Turku, with a bishopric initially held by two Englishmen and later exclusively by Finns, the center of the Church was developed.
At the beginning of the 13th century, Rome placed the converted pagans under its formal protection against the East, and it was not until a hundred years later, in 1249, that a Second Crusade led to the Christianization of the Hämenen.
The Karelians resisted the longest: their conversion began in 1293.
These crusades did not amount to a conquest by Sweden, but nevertheless, they constituted a violent conversion: hordes of warriors and monks flooded the land and condemned to destruction those who defiantly stood up to the overwhelming force; only slowly did the national spirit recover.
Caught between the old faith and the new, this faith groped its way through the conflict to find a middle ground where Christian beliefs merged with ancient customs - Catholicism itself, however, left no stone unturned in its efforts to win over the baptized, especially in the western part of the country where numerous stone churches from the 14th and 15th centuries bear witness to its effectiveness.

These churches stand out for their simple, rectangular shape with a deeply pitched roof, and the interior derives a very special charm from its lively ornamentation: delicately shaded frescoes in which the artists' original imagination wove some pagan motifs into the Christian narrative.
Yet despite the Church's efforts, its doctrine, as it emanated from the south, from Rome, remained almost entirely foreign to the hearts of the people - meanwhile, Martin Luther's teachings found a quicker reception, and the national spirit of Suomi[2] was henceforth subjected to decisive internal changes.
As it is written:

*"Protestantism ushered in an era of intolerant and strict orthodoxy: more passionately than before, the clergy of Finland cracked down on all forms of 'superstition,' which, with its sacrifices and other ritual practices, continued to thrive deep within the country and had merely adapted outwardly to the Catholic faith, without any profound change in beliefs or concepts."*

[2] The name for Finland in Finnish. - The Translator

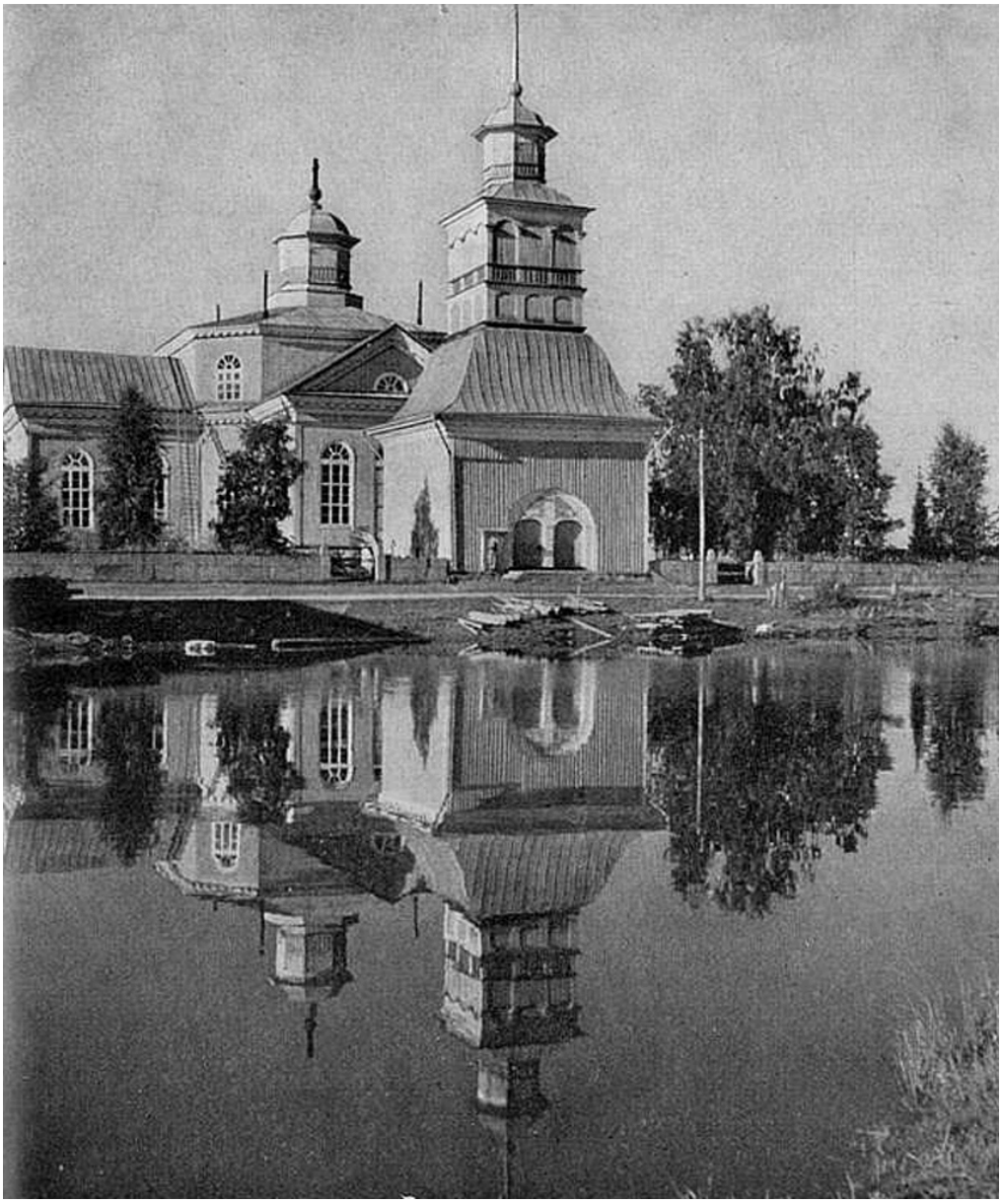
In the Kalevala songs and many customs, however, the Finns preserved a legacy of the faith and way of life of their ancestors from pre-Christian times well into the 20th century.
In the districts away from the major roads, thanks to the inexhaustible strength of the people, folk-religious thinking has been preserved over the centuries to the present day, and in all times of trial, even the most recent ones—especially during the last war against the Soviet Union—a genuine attitude of faith, sustained by a Nordic moral consciousness, has proven its worth.



**St. Lawrence Church in Lohja, 2nd century**

**At night, the solstice fires are lit**

**Christian chapel on an ancient pagan sacrificial site**



**Wood is the natural building material**

## The Clan and Death

A small wooden church in a Karelian village, not far from Tolvajärvi—the service has ended; women and girls, many in traditional dress, linger in the cemetery, which stretches downhill from the church to the lakeshore.
Tall trees cast dark shadows over the graves and the slowly decaying mausoleums. Some women carry baskets of bread and boat-shaped pastries: what will they do with them in the cemetery?
Some go to pick juniper branches and then solemnly trace circles over the graves with them, while others murmur incomprehensible incantations to themselves as they place the offerings on the grave - as they were about to leave, I asked about the meaning of their actions.
“Look, when a person dies, they do not die completely: flowers and trees grow from their body while their soul passes through heat and cold to the cascade in the realm of the dead, where it then traverses good and evil and returns to the earth.
As long as the soul is in the realm of the dead, it has power over all people; it wants the laws of the ancestors to be respected, otherwise, the soul of the dead brings misfortune to the living.
One must honor the dead: that is why we bring food to the graves, for the soul, too, should have food; however, even before the funeral, a domestic animal is slaughtered for the first memorial service.
When the coffin is placed on the hearse, the head of the household passes an old goblet filled with mead over it to the gathered mourners, and once everyone has drunk, he walks three times around the coffin with the full glass and finally pours the mead onto the horse’s head - through this symbolic act, everyone is reconciled with the deceased.
Harmony must also be established with the ancestors who have gone before to the realm of the dead, and the good spirits are summoned with great ceremony - on the village street, the remains of the coffin wood are set alight, and the coffin is lifted over the flames; when the clan then enters the mourning house for the funeral, they cross a funeral pyre on the threshold.
There is also a grand celebration for the dead - long in advance, a bull calf, barley, and rye are set aside for the feast, and the entire clan gathers and discusses the day of the celebration."
“What kind of celebration is that, and when does it take place?”
“Ah, whenever one wishes, or if the ancestors have determined it before their death, but always in the fall. The eldest of the clan asks God for his blessing six weeks beforehand: the house, the barn, and the shed are cleaned; the door and the stove are left wide open so that the soul can enter the room more easily; for six weeks, food is prepared for the deceased, and a bed is made for him on the hearth, while for the night, drinking water and a candle are set out, for the fire warms the souls of both the living and the dead.
After weeks of preparation, all relatives and acquaintances gather for the great funeral feast, and the clan’s eldest goes to the cemetery with the mourners to invite the deceased and later welcome them into the house with a greeting - this is how we used to honor the dead, who live among us even beyond death.
Young people may well laugh at us often, since the world is changing; the young think they are wiser than we are and say that the dead are dead and no longer live, but that is wrong, for they live just like the living, which is why a small house is often built over their grave, as you have seen here: the souls pass through the windows when they wish to wander or go to visit their parents and siblings.”

The clan forms the healthy and vibrant core of the community, and it is not uncommon for parents to live together with their married children and grandchildren in a large family home.

Large families dwell together not as a collection of parts, but as an inseparable whole, where each finds their life within the lives of the others - no physical separation can destroy this bond, no separation in the world, and none through death.

The love of relatives embraces both those who have passed away and those who are present in equal measure, and looks with equal calm and confidence toward those who will come to continue the chain - as the songs of the Kalevala have proclaimed since time immemorial, death is not an end, but a transformation into new birth.

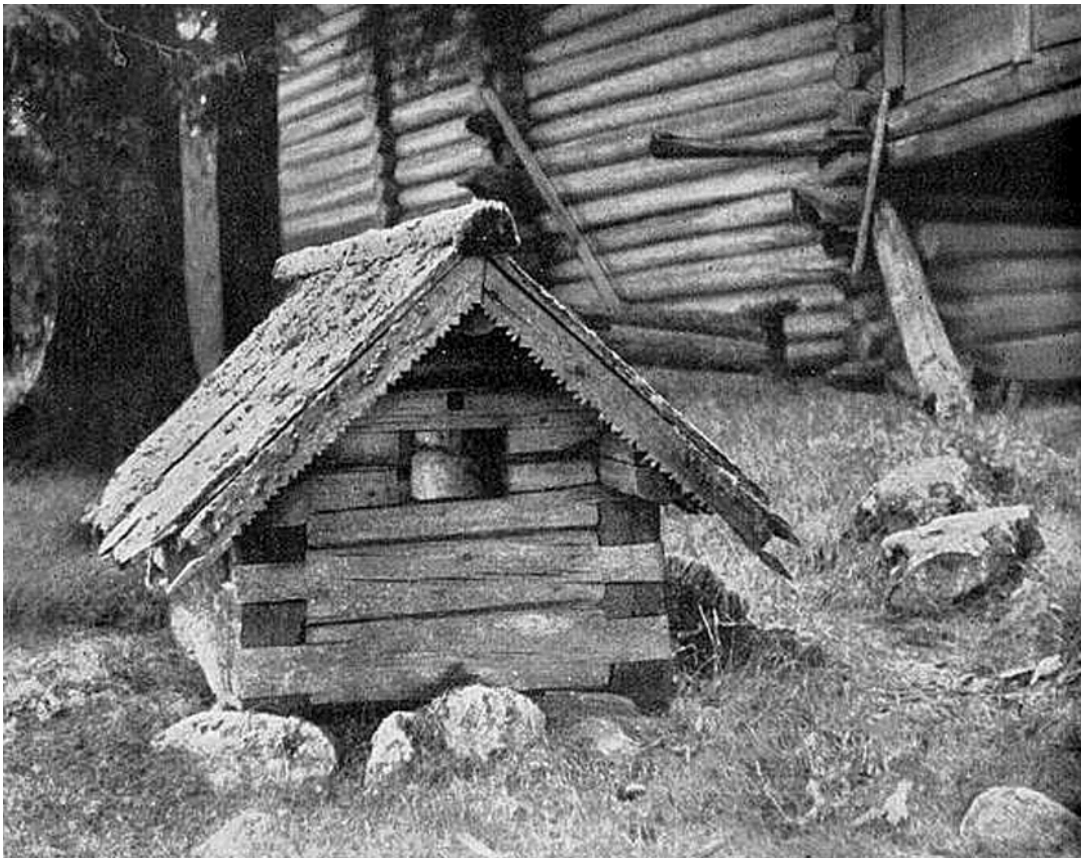
The bird and the boat on the grave crosses of Karelian cemeteries are symbols of the imperishable soul, which can take the form of a bird and glide across the dark waters of the Tuonela River into the realm of the dead; from the window of the small grave house, the soul can return for a time to children and grandchildren to tell of "the other side," to advise and help, to take part in what happens on the farm.

A small soul, without a clan, without fellowship with the living, may well be completely extinguished.

In the large family community, death is also a form of life that hardly differs from the real one: people sit down to a shared meal when they bring food and drink to the grave for the ancestor, for he lives a thousandfold in the blood and thoughts of his children, is present in them and for them, and at the same time lives on ahead of them.

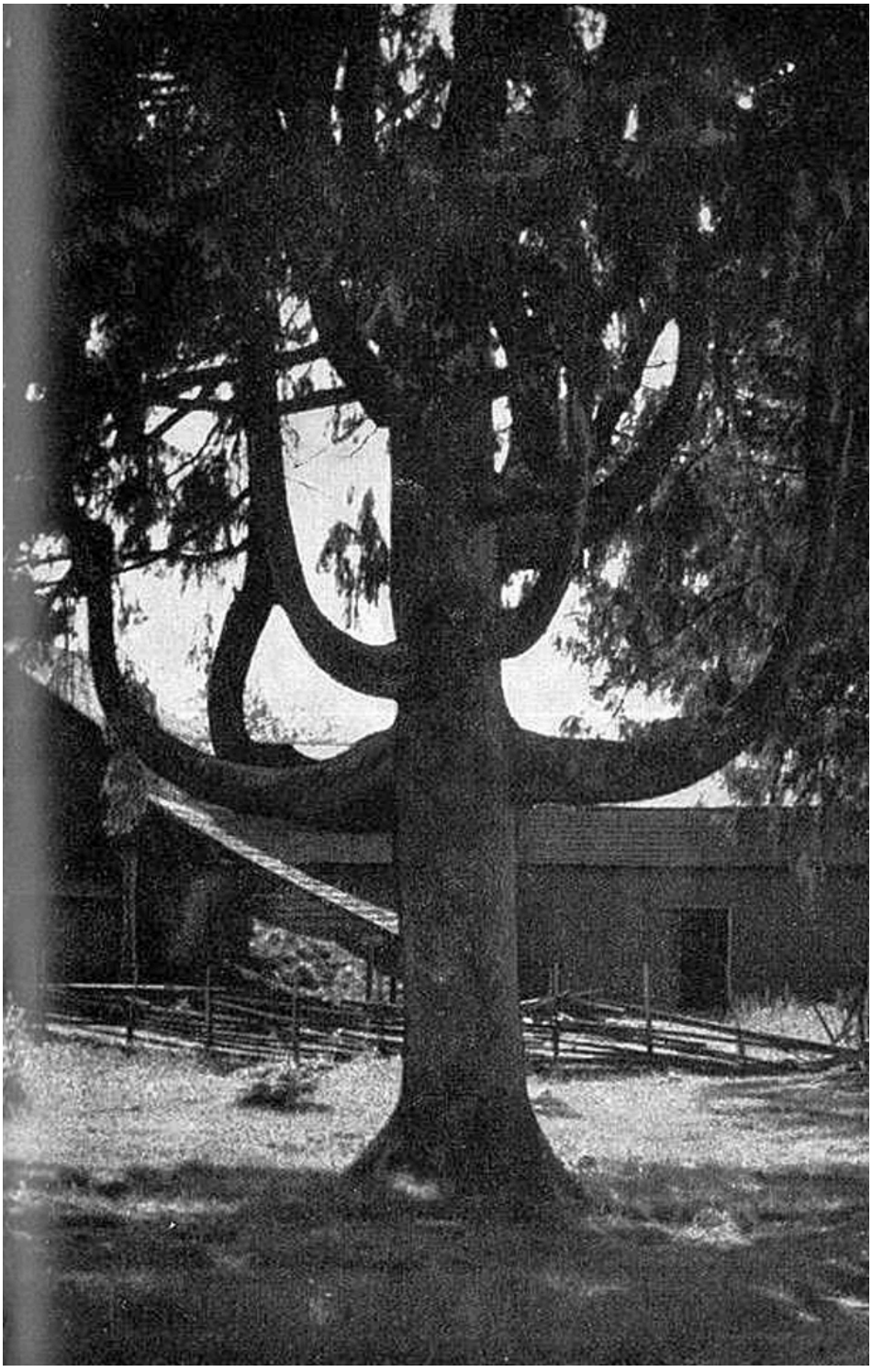
All heaviness is taken from death - if the Karelian women broke out in violent lamentations upon a death, it was only to bring aid to the soul in the difficult transition from one state to another, for even at the joyful events of life, at birth and marriage, participation in the transformation of the soul was expressed through equally painful lamentations.

Only one death is truly death—the end of the clan, the time when the proud ancestral tree in front of the house, which has seen generation after generation come and go, and from whose branches one always cut off a limb when the Grim Reaper took someone from the clan, is felled entirely: with the last of the clan, the tree—the symbol of former greatness and strength—also dies.



**Burial House — the home of the dead**

**The sacrifice is the bond between the living and the dead**



**The ancestral tree**

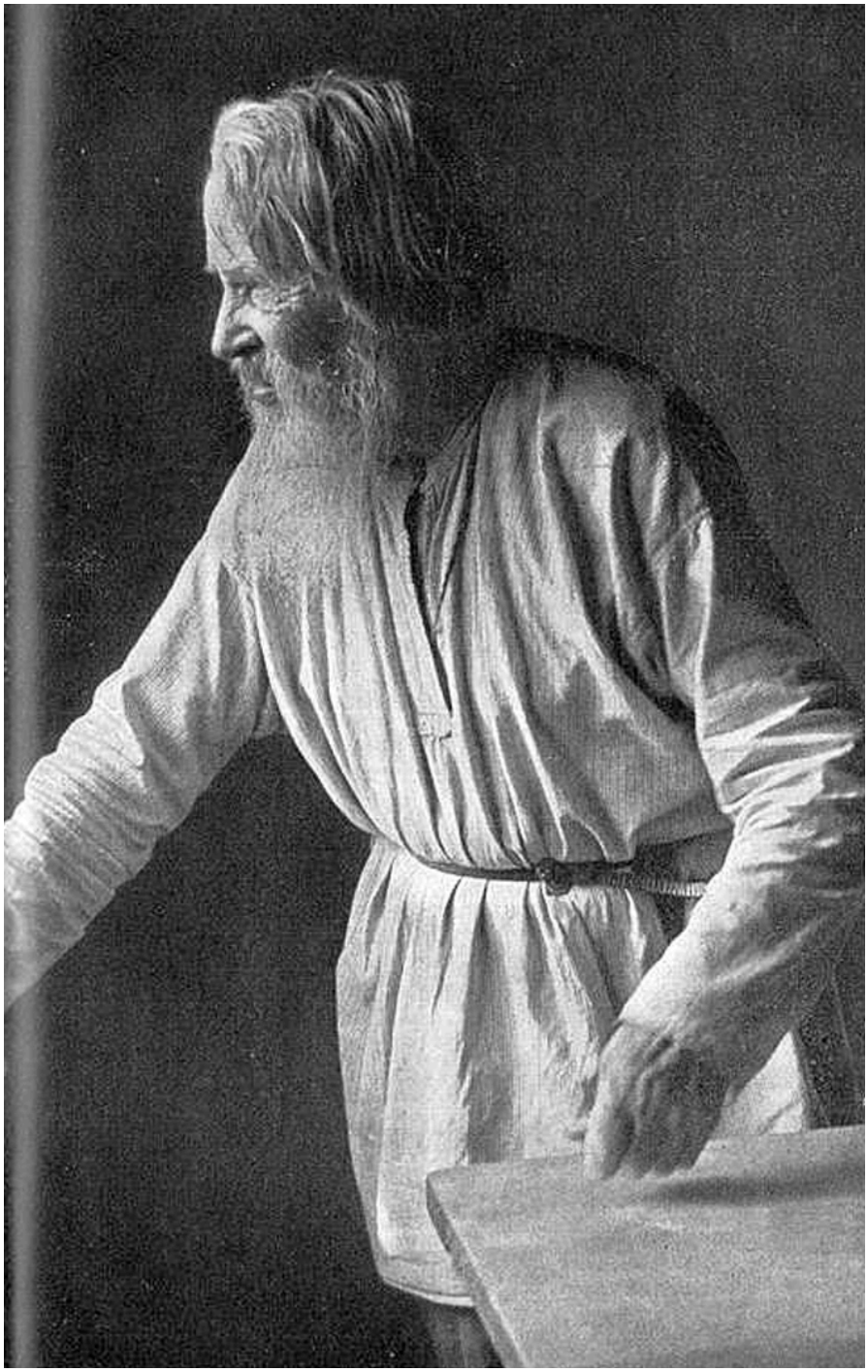
**Mourning**

## The Schemeikka Clan

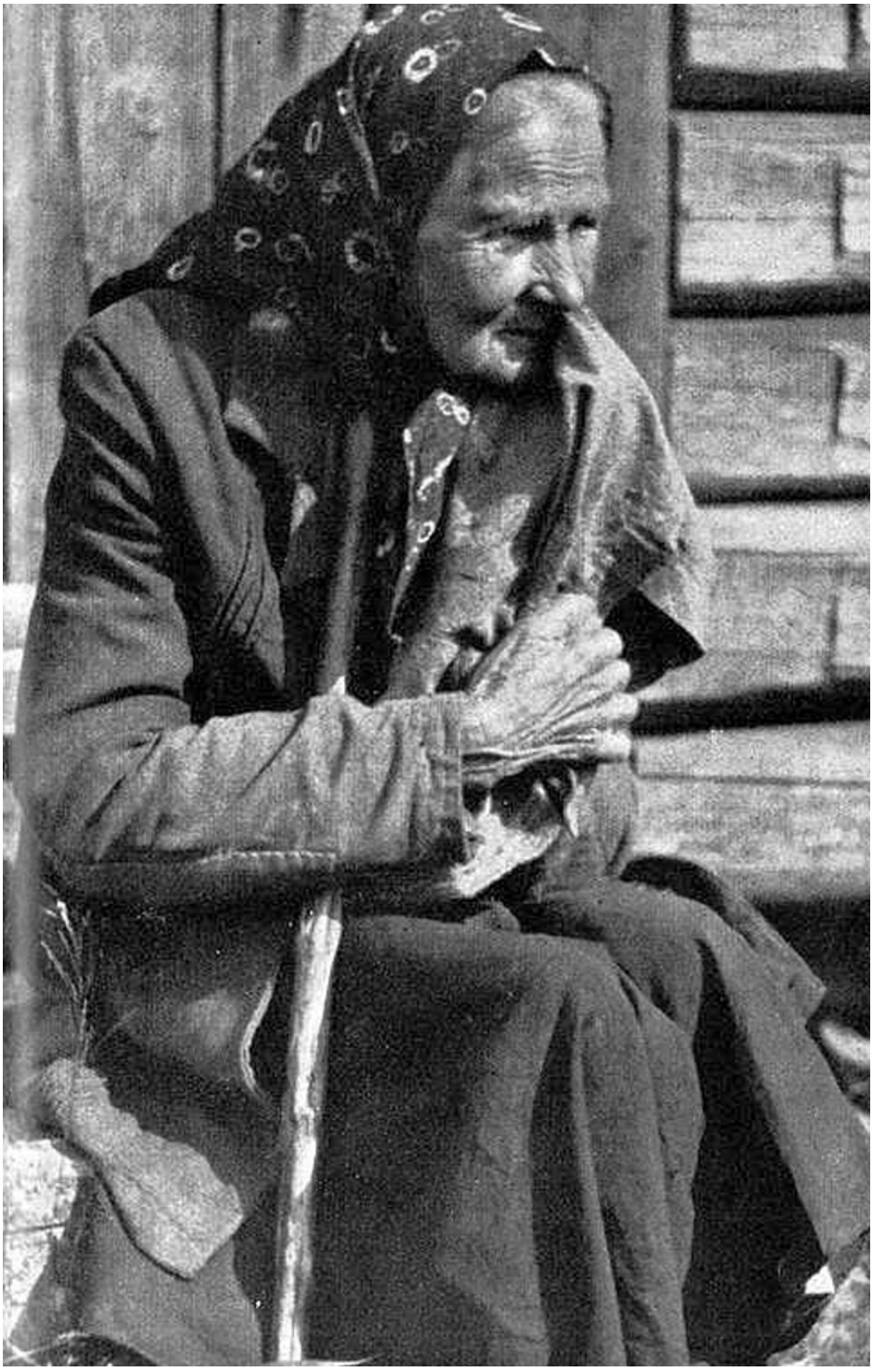
In eastern Finland, the Finnish people preserve the memory of Pedri, the singer and sage from the famous Schemeikka clan - in times long past, the forefather of all Schemeikkas roamed the dense, game-rich forests as a fearless hunter, and a day's walk from the main road, he built his forest cabin, for the bounty was rich with bears and lynx, wolverines and wild ducks, hares and foxes, and other game.
As his sons grew up, they worked hard alongside their father: with a crash and a crack, the ancient giant trees fell, and their charred roots scattered a loose layer of fertile ash over the cleared land; the following summer brings the first ripening crops, and fresh logs are fashioned into sturdy barns where the harvest can be stored, and which also serve as warm sleeping quarters for the servants.
Along with the farmland, the Schemeikka clan flourished, soon growing beyond the boundaries of the forest settlement.
Much is preserved in the souls of the Schemeikkas: from the whispering of the forests, from the storm wind that bent the treetops low to the ground, from the struggle of the elements, and from the language of their first and most faithful companions, the animals; the Schemeikka clan weaves, with both joy and depth, objects from the dawn of civilization, the secret powers of nature, and the strength of their being into unforgettable fairy tales for children and their children's children.

Old Pekko Schemeikka told me about the sacred serpents on a quiet summer evening:
When the spring sun warms the earth once more, the serpent people gather for the great Day of Judgment, assembling in a wide circle around the oldest and wisest among them, the judge serpent with the white stripe on its neck.
In its mouth it carries the stone that grants it the power to pronounce the correct judgment without fail, and before her lies the punishment or imprisonment stone, with a small circular hole through which every condemned member of her people must crawl though, in agony, once or many times.
An irresistible urge had seized Pekko to steal this stone, which makes one invincible - for years he searched in vain for the annual court site, to the point where he almost forgot his quest, until, unexpectedly, during a spring walk through the fields, the old man sees a thousand tiny heads swaying back and forth in the glistening dew-covered grass in the morning breeze - with its head held high like a king, the judge-snake sits in the midst of its people, and before it lies a defendant stretched out in the grass as if dead, with only the tip of its tail gliding timidly across the ground.
Pekko burns with a feverish heat, and without a moment's thought, he leaps into the center of the enchanted circle with a spruce walking stick and strikes at the white-necked snake; it hisses furiously up his staff, and with a sense of paralyzing horror, he watches its retinue rush to its aid from all directions.
At this moment, he remembers his sister's snake-charmers' incantations, which had been passed down to her from pagan times: he calms down again, though his heart still pounds violently, and the staff crashes down hard on the tangle of snake heads, whereupon the creatures collapse lifelessly.
As they do, his grip on the queen's head loosens, and she leaps in a high arc into the bushes, the survivors of her people following her with a hissing sound - the imprisonment stone, however, remains the reward for Pekko's fearlessness.
He proudly shows it to me: it is round, with a small hole in the center, resembling the plumb line that the people of the Early Stone Age used to weigh down their nets.

When Pekko sensed his end approaching, he gave me the stone, which has witnessed the vicissitudes of many millennia pass before it before it found its way into a Berlin collection - and yet, it is not dead, for even if it lacks the warmth of human presence today, the sight of it still conjures up a thousand images in our imagination, testifying to the deeds and struggles of our ancestors; it can awaken a deep joy within us for their rich world, and the legacy that the creative power of our forefathers has bestowed upon us obliges us to a future that is equal to the past.



**Pekko Schemeikka of the rune singer lineage**



**Pekko Schemeikka's sister during the snake-charming ritual**

**Storehouse in the village of Schemeikka**

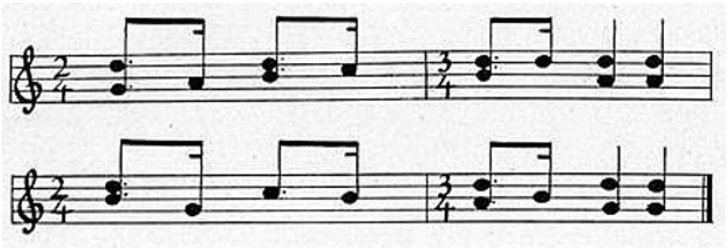
## Rune Singer

Just as a tree grows toward the sun on barren soil between two giant rocks, so too did the Karelian people emerge from the shadows of history later than the Finns and the Häme people - through hardship and struggle, through sacrifice and sweat, they brought the barren soil of beautiful Karelia to life, and in this borderland between West and East, they have managed to preserve their distinct identity to this very day. Every time the West and the East clashed here, time and again, the Karelians had to bear the brunt of the fighting: the dense forests served as strongholds for the defense of their homeland, and fortified castles still bear witness today to a past marked by a love of battle and courage in combat.
Despite the constant threat and hardship facing their homeland—where times of peace were merely a chance to catch one's breath and gather strength before new storms—the Karelian spirit shines brightly and strongly among the Finnish people, setting a hopeful example.
Deeply rooted in their native soil, the Karelian people have most faithfully preserved the cultural heritage of the Finnish nation - while an easy life causes people's diverse talents to wither away quickly, hard struggle develops all existing gifts, including intellectual ones; when Karelian villages were destroyed in the course of history, when the fires of war ravaged forests and fields, nothing could destroy the Karelians' optimism.
From the ruins, they built their simple lives: the Karelian is headstrong, unyielding, proud, and yet a dreamer, a poet, and a lover of music; it is no coincidence, then, that it was in Karelia that the great epic of heroes and gods, the Kalevala, was faithfully preserved, and that one could still encounter the old rune singers here.

One day, my path led me through unspoiled countryside, where dark forests and mighty hills, mostly formed of smooth, rounded boulders, create a mysterious atmosphere.
Small paths wind through the forests, which stretch for hundreds of kilometers; the path runs alongside numerous lakes, whose silent waters reflect the night sky with its clarity—if one can even call those few hours of twilight "night" at all during the summer.
A radiant, blond boy guides me to my destination, to old Timo - no one will be able to quickly forget the singer's furrowed face, above which a pair of large eyes shine.
His gaze is fixed far into the distance, as if he were seeing the heroes of his songs there; he leans forward slightly, as if to listen to a mysterious melody - yet Timo can neither read nor write.
He knows nothing of civilization or technology; he has seen a car only once in his life, but never a train, for he could not bring himself to leave his home village.
In his quiet, solitary existence, he has preserved a lively heart and a clear mind: he possesses that knowledge gleaned from nature, with which his ancestors mastered their lives hundreds of years ago.

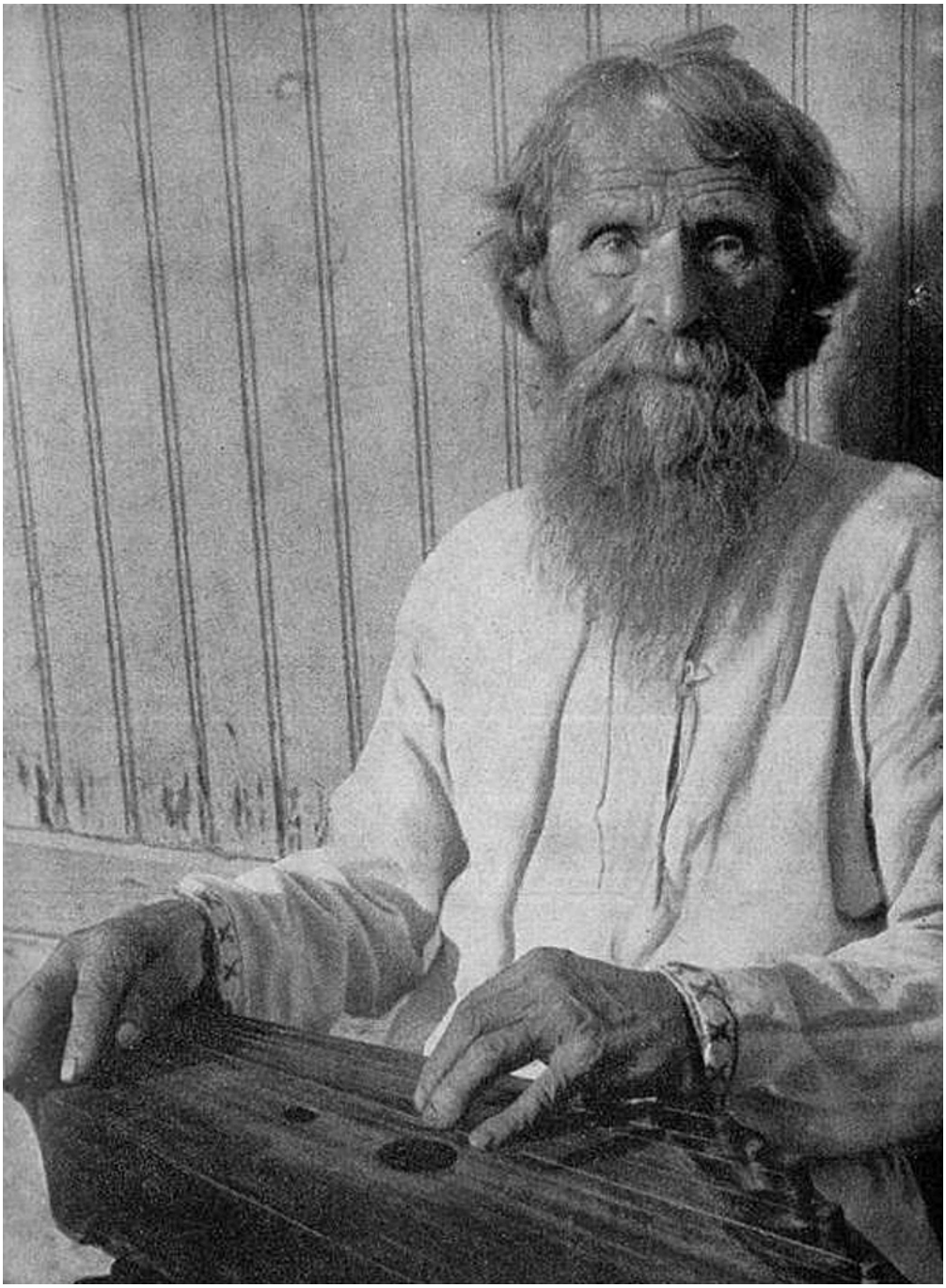
I asked him to sing a few verses from the Kalevala, but he doesn't understand this request; he says that he has never heard of that collection of his ancestors' most beautiful songs, and I think I must have been mistaken - how is it that this man, who was described to me as a singer of the old runic songs, doesn't know the Kalevala at all?
But then he speaks to me in his deep, calm voice, in strangely accented Finnish:
"I will sing for you - listen."
He calls over another old man; this one seems younger, for he stands straighter.
"That is my son."

They sit down near the hearth, facing each other, and join hands:
“We must join hands so that our powers may grow,” they explain as they sway back and forth to a gentle rhythm and begin to sing: one sings, the other answers...
Is this a song? Yes and no.
The melody is rhythmic, like a recitative - when I asked them to recite their runes again, the words were no longer the same, for they invented new verses as they sang.



Yet the content of the songs, however, is the same as in pagan times - the world arises from the love between air and water, emerging from the egg of the primordial bird; they tell of the struggle between the heroes of the bright Kalevala and the dark forces of the Lapps; they know the wisdom and power that works through music and words; they sing of the peace that reigned among humans and animals, of the wealth and poverty of the people, of joy and work, of death and immortality; they uttered words whose existence I was completely unaware of, sentences that possessed a strange meaning - thus I grasped the richness of the Finnish language.
How is it possible that illiterate peasants possess such profound knowledge and rich skill?
They sing the language of the Kalevala without suspecting the existence of the scholarly collection of these songs, yet they are closer to tradition, living more directly in the spirit of the past, than scholars who studied diligently, for they believe in what they sing: they themselves are part of the songs.
Joy and love, anger and bliss, melancholy and humor - all of this echoes in the songs and are a reflection of their own lives.

After the devastating war of 1939–40, Timo, too, left his fathers’ homestead with his kinsmen to avoid falling into the hands of Asian Bolshevism - throughout history, now repeated once more, the Karelians have had to endure many hardships as guardians of the borders.
Nevertheless, what remained most sacred and essential to them was their homeland, though still, for the first time, the Karelians had lost their forests and fields, their homes and farms.
Without their own land, a Karelian is like a tree without roots: will he be able to preserve his ancient traditions?
Timo could not bear the separation from his homeland, nor did he live to see a return to his beloved Karelia—he died in the West: with him, the last rune singer, the custom of this song has also become history.



**The last rune singer playing the kantele**

## Lönnrot and the Kalevala

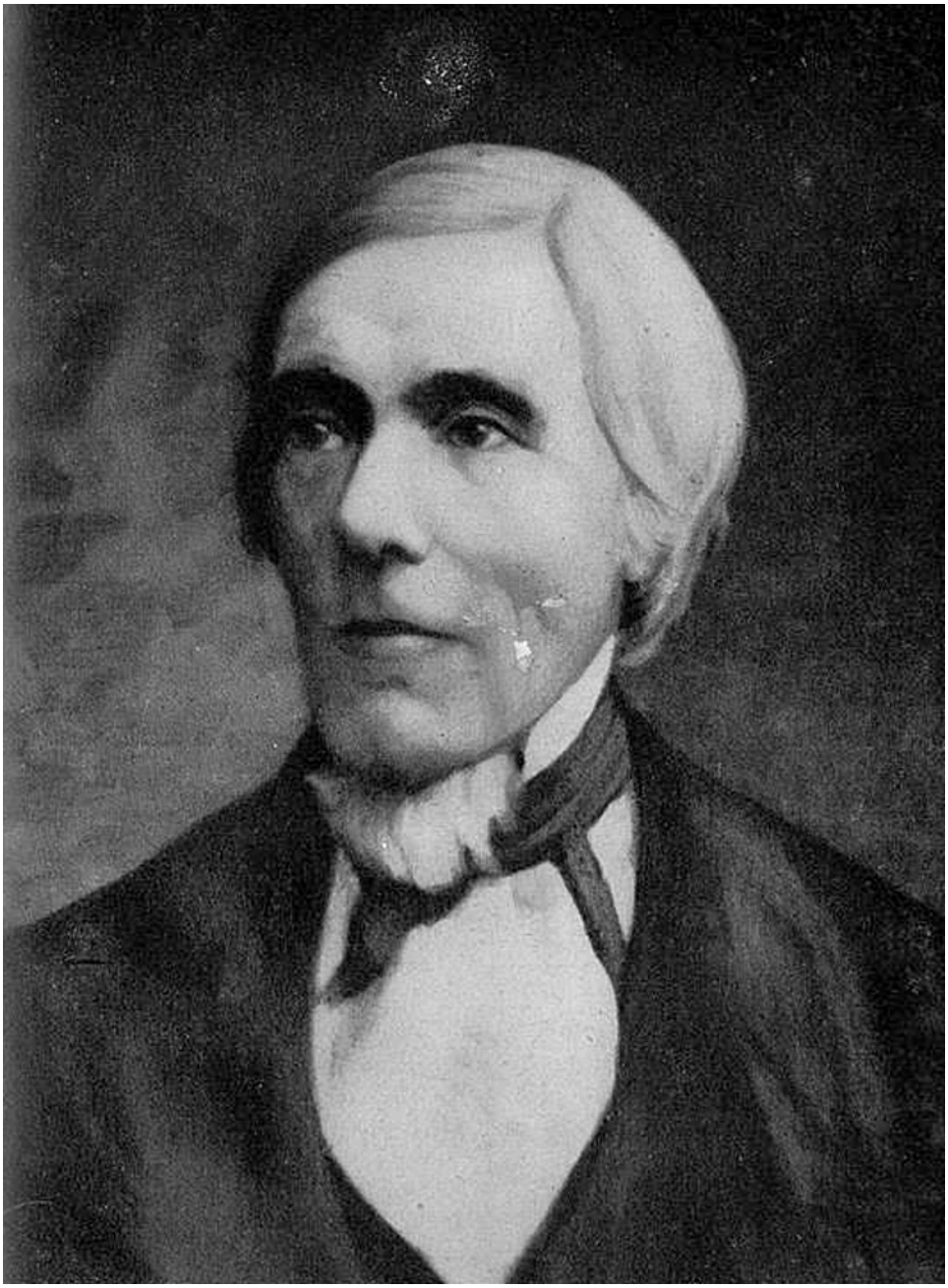
Amid the hustle and bustle of the young capital city of Helsinki lies an old cemetery that has been converted into a public park - there, amid gravestones beneath tall trees, stand two simple monuments to the fallen German and Finnish heroes—the liberators of Helsinki in 1918.
Not far from there, the memorial stone for Elias Lönnrot has found its place: through his collection of old folk poetry in the middle of the last century, this man helped usher in Finland's cultural renaissance.

As I gazed at the monument—Lönnrot's spiritual face, his figure in a coarse coat, wearing high hiking boots, with pencil and paper—the story of his life came back to me, detail by detail.
Was not his fate in many ways similar to that of his contemporary from the first flowering of the Kalevala, the great dramatic and epic poet Aleksis Kivi! Lönnrot's youth was also marked by poverty, with hunger as his constant companion; the high cost of living during the Finnish-Russian War of 1808–09 often forced young Elias to go begging, yet he almost forgot the humiliation and hardship of his situation in the face of the beauty of his native parish of Sammatti in southern Finland, which he often explored on foot.
Hardship had even less power over him when his thoughts were filled with the stirring, ancient songs he heard on his later wanderings through Karelia, for they reminded him very much of his beloved Homer, whom he had studied many a time while perched in a tree in his parents' garden.
He himself had learned to read early, and his intellectual alertness soon became apparent, but his father wanted his son to follow the same profession as his own: "If you are not a tailor, you will not be a man." - then Elias's brother stood up for him, and after many interruptions, great difficulties, and all sorts of temporary jobs, he was able to enter university at the age of twenty, and upon completing his studies, he settled as a doctor in the small town of Kajaani, not far from the Russian border.
A passion for ancient folk poetry had taken hold of him there, and he devoted every spare moment to his collections; the Karelian peasants, even those across the border, placed their trust in him, for he came to them not as a stranger and scholar, but as a friend and medical advisor - thus they told him poem after poem.
From numerous variants, he was able to select the best ones and was able to compile a coherent epic in 1835 and, even more completely, in 1849 - just as with the Iliad and the Odyssey, he assumed with regard to the Kalevala that all the individual songs originally belonged to a single, unified epic.

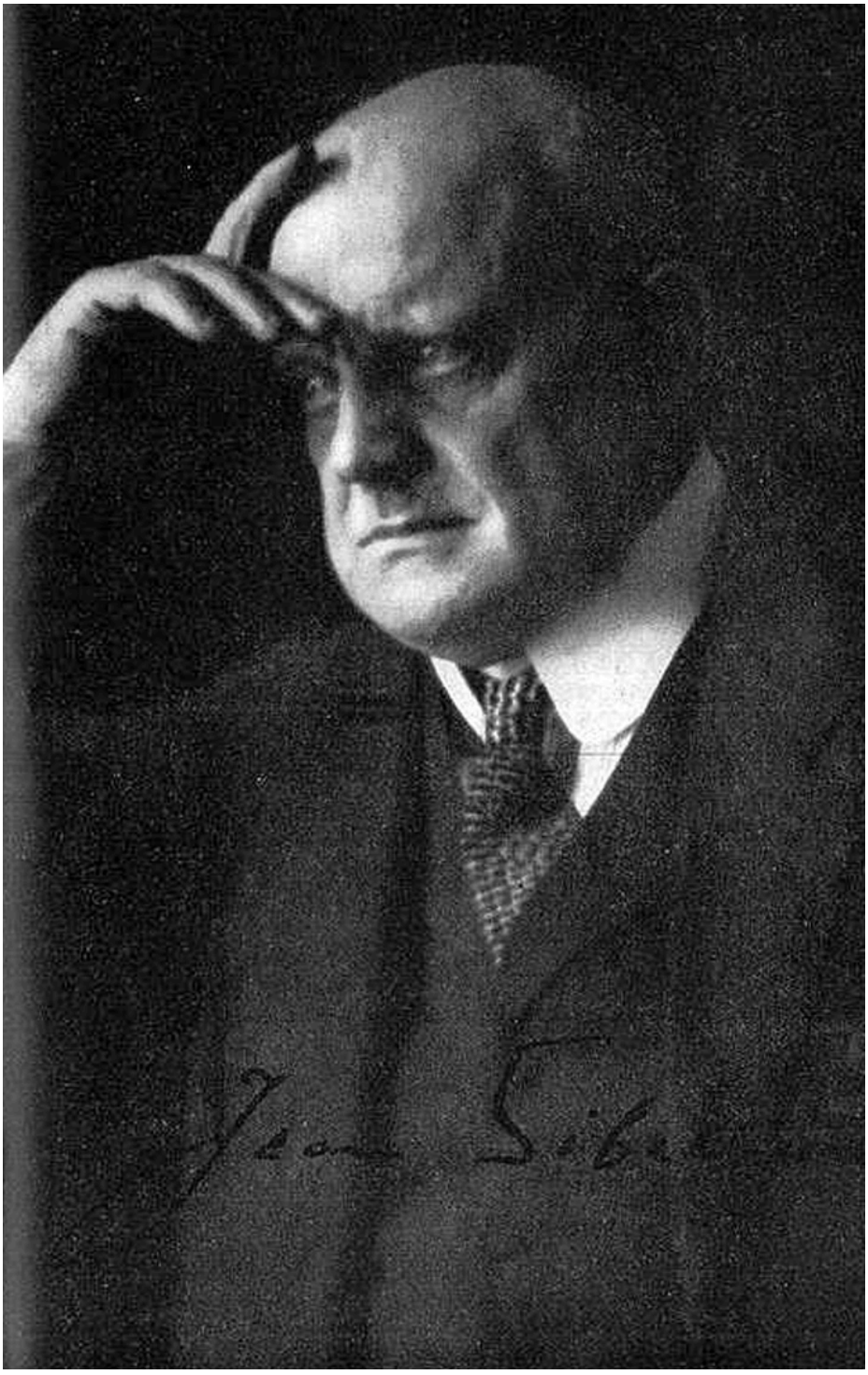
What do we learn in the Kalevala?
The epic recounts the creation of the world: the Air Maiden descends into the sea, is impregnated by the Wind, and gives birth to the "old, wise Väinämöinen"; this world had emerged from one of the seven world eggs, and Väinämöinen, the Wise One, was henceforth to determine its order.
His power is music: through singing and playing the kantele, he proclaims wisdom to the people, awakens love and kindness within them, and touches their souls.
Väinämöinen is also particularly concerned for the welfare of his land, Kalevala: he protects it against the forces of darkness and the attacks of the magical Lapps.
In the creation of the world, the World Tree is not forgotten, nor is the forging of a healing device capable of bringing salvation to humanity: the Sampo.
The sun is lost, and a new fire is born; people traverse the realm of the dead and awaken to a new life - virtually all the defining features of the pre-Christian worldview, some of which can be traced back to the early days of Finnish tribes shortly after the turn of the era, reappear in the Kalevala.

The significance of the Kalevala lies not in the coherence of the narrative, but—and this is typical of the Finnish way—in the vividness of the imagery, the depth and humanity of the characters, the power of emotion and imagination, and the brilliance and musical beauty of the expression - through masterful shaping of the form and a unified vision of life and the world, the individual events are woven into a cohesive whole.

Lönnrot's work had an unforeseen impact: the nation's cultural and intellectual life and creativity were awakened more powerfully than ever before and, through the Kalevala, gained entirely new foundations; for the first time, through Lönnrot, the Finns saw before them a testament to their great past that unleashed the forces needed for a great future.



**Elias Lönnrot — Finland's Jacob Grimm**



**The rune singer Larin Paraske — guardian of ancient folk tunes**

## Finnish Music

A concert hall in Berlin—the Finlandia Choir is singing.
Men whose musicality is immediately apparent, with chiseled features, take the stage, and the maestro Heikki Klemetti, whose every movement is filled with musical excitement, raises his baton.
In greeting to our host country and friends, the German national anthem and the Finnish national anthem, "Our Land," resound simply and powerfully; the melodies almost rush past one another in the joy of singing.
Finnish songs and Finnish music derive their distinctive character from contrasts: here, tenderness and strength, melancholy and the brightest exuberance, peace and fierce struggle stand side by side.
Finnish music is a clear mirror of the nature of the North, where music is storm and lightning, the whistling of the wind in the trees, the murmur of the waves, the colors of the sun; the Finn knew then and now that musical harmony could bring him closer to the great symphony of the universe.

A few days after the performance, I had an unforgettable conversation about music with a young Finnish artist who was both a poet and a musician - some of what he said, especially what he had to say about music in the ancient legends of his people, is recorded here.
Who is not familiar with the Finns' love of singing and their musicality? The melodies and rhythms of Finnish folk music are distinguished by the depth of their expression, the richness of their forms, the beauty of their sound, and the depth of their emotion; it is known that the first melodies arose in the hearts of the faithful during religious rituals in pre-Christian times, and that the lamenters accompanied the soul's passage through the three most significant events of human life—birth, marriage, and death—with recitative-like, rhythmically free songs.
The rune singers—the priests and teachers of the people—carried the knowledge and deeds of the heroes and gods of antiquity from generation to generation with the accompanying sounds of the zither-like kantele, whose four or five notes they knew how to vary masterfully through raising or lowering, strengthening or softening.
The teaching of wisdom has always been linked to the sound of music - thus, the truths of the Kalevala are still revealed anew today by the runesinger.

The wise hero of the saga, Väinämöinen, built the first kantele, and with the songs he draws from it, he rules the entire world; as he sits upon the Singer's Stone and touches the strings, true joy awakens, and peace descends upon the people: all of nature, both the visible and the invisible, gathers, spellbound, by the harmony of the song.
Then came the hosts of Tapio, the Forest King, and his flock—the squirrels, the wolves, and the bears; then the birds floated down through the clouds, where there sat the daughters of the air, the radiant Moon Maiden and the daughter of the Sun King, upon the shimmering rainbow, to listen to Väinämöinen's magnificent playing.
All the people of the water swam to the shore, for there was not a single person among the people whom the singer did not move: the living on earth, in the water, and in the air listened to the wondrous harp, and the forests and mountains, the stones in the sea, the sand, and the trees began to dance.

*Väinämöinen's fingers play,*
*His harp's strings resound,*

*Mountains leap, boulders crash,*
*Whole cliffs themselves roar,*
*Stones burst upon the waves,*
*Gravel itself swims in the water,*
*Spruce trees were full of joy,*
*Trunks leap upon the heath.*

*When he played in his home,*
*In the dwelling made of firs,*
*Then the roof resounded,*
*Then the floor often thundered,*
*The ceiling sang, the doors howled,*
*All the windows cheered merrily.*
*Even the stones of the stove sway,*
*And the pillars themselves resounded.*

*When he wanders through the spruce forest,*
*When he walks through the fir groves,*
*All the spruces bow low,*
*The firs bend toward the earth,*
*Their branches fall down.*
*All the birds in the skies,*
*All those with two wings,*
*Came fluttering there cheerfully,*
*Came flying in hastily,*
*To listen to the sounds;*
*To rejoice in admiration.*
*When the eagle heard at home*
*This beautiful playing of Suomi,*
*He left the young ones in the nest,*
*And set out himself to fly*
*To the noble hero's harp,*
*To Väinämöinen's playing.*

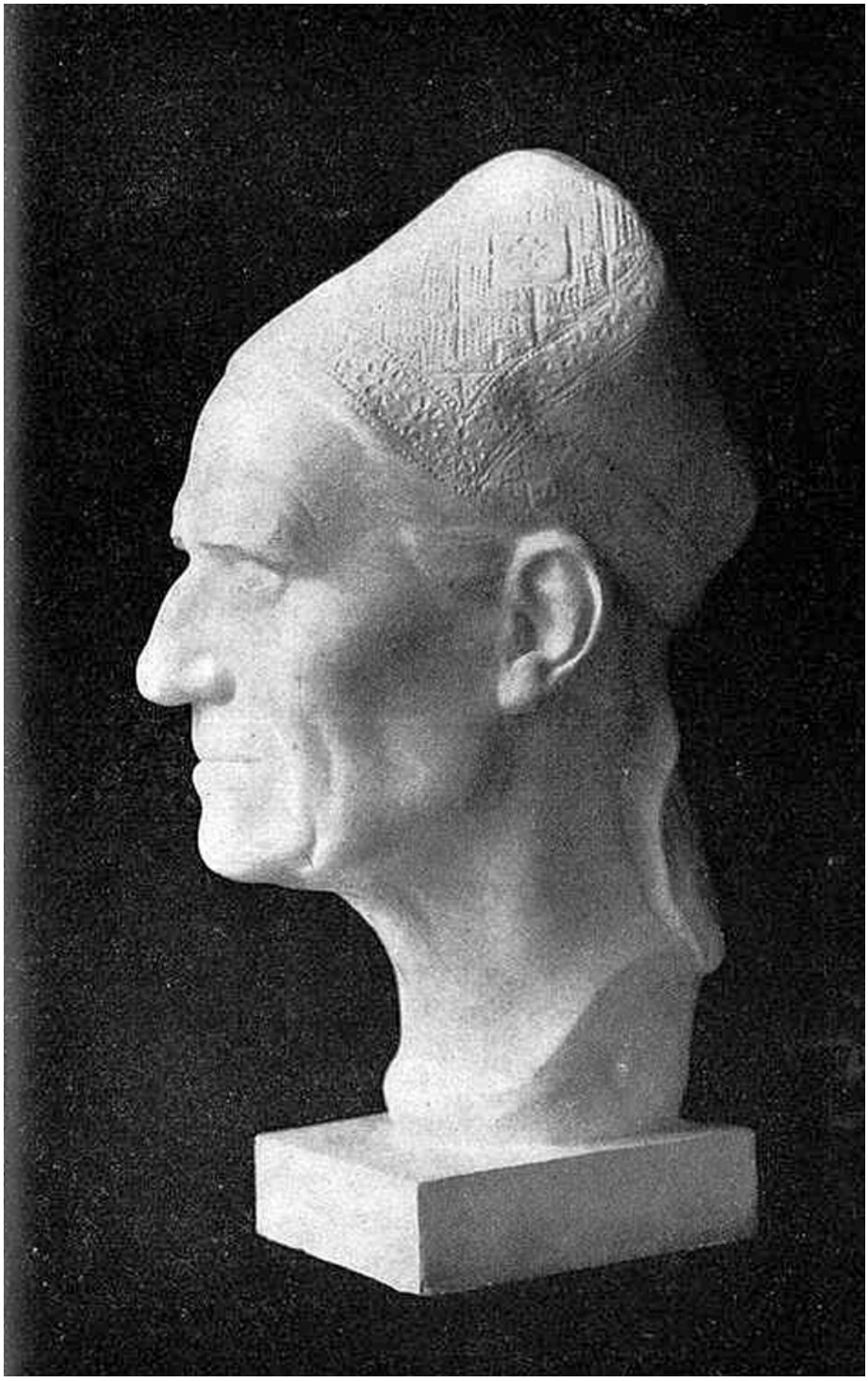
*Ahto, king of the waves,*
*With an old man's grassy beard,*
*Drags himself to the water's surface,*
*Swims on a water lily,*
*And listens to the beautiful sounds,*
*As he speaks these words himself:*
*"Never have I heard the like,*
*As long as time endures,*
*This playing of Väinämöinen,*
*The sounds of this bard."*

The sacred music resounds, and all of nature is filled with glorious harmony; those who hate one another—humans and animals alike—all forget their grudges, for all forget that life can be full of hatred and hardship.
Väinämöinen plays on the first and second days—no one moves, and only the tears, flowing freely, reveal the echo of the souls.

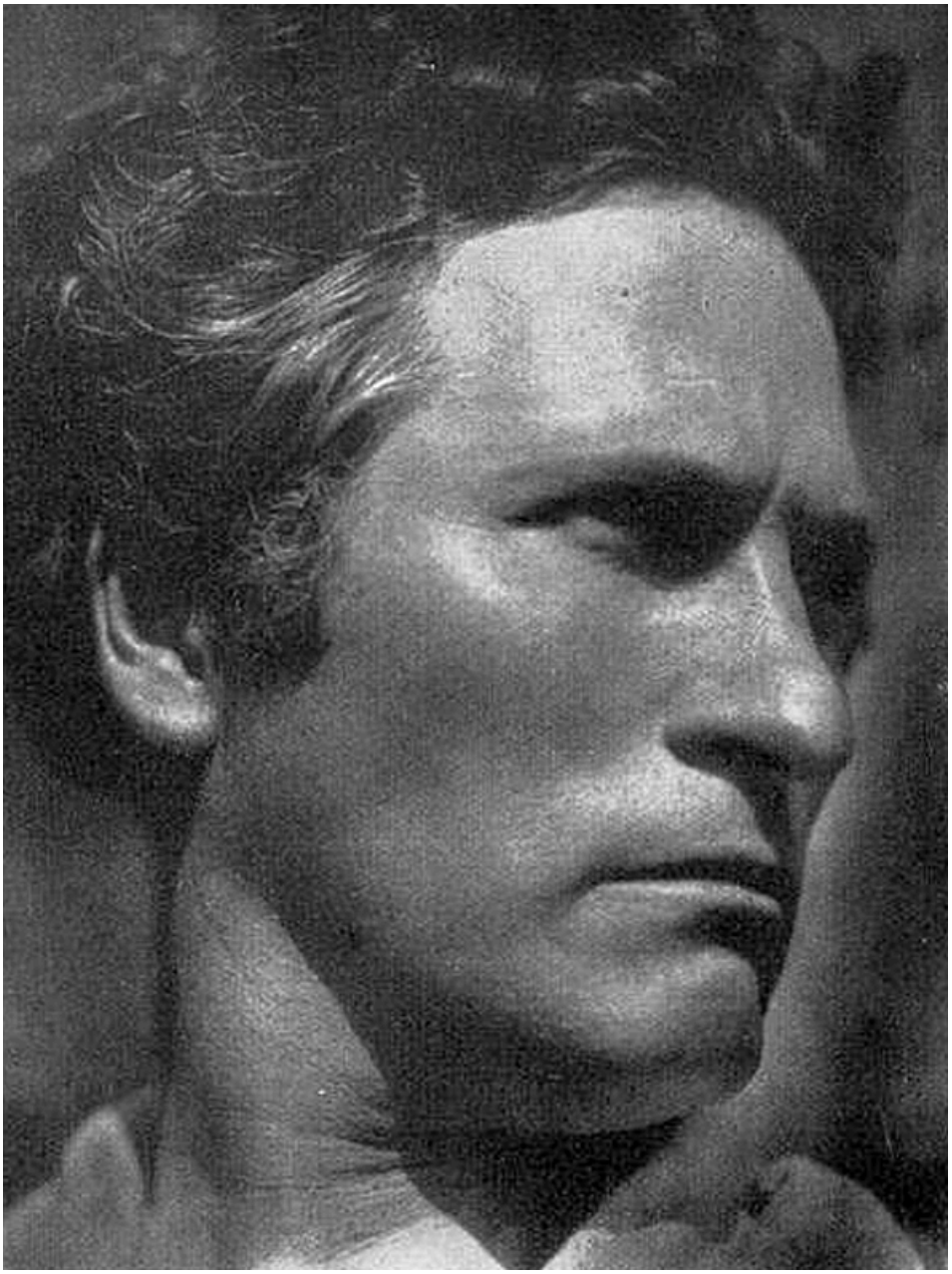
In the creations of church and art music, this original musicality has found expression no less than within the traditions of the ancient folk spirit: the most beautiful, melodious church hymns were developed from folk songs or through free, creative adaptations of traditional chorales.
The beginnings of art music can be traced back four centuries - during the heyday of national development, in the 19th century, Germans who felt a strong connection to Finland—rooted in a sense of essential kinship—provided fruitful inspiration: Frederik Bacius, the composer of the Finnish national anthem, and R. Faltin, who compiled a hymnal.
The Academy of Music and the Philharmonic Orchestra in Helsinki developed into the most significant centers of musical culture, and names such as Melartin, Järnefelt, Palmgren, Merikanto, Kilpinen, Kuula, Klami, and Hannikainen became known far beyond the borders of their homeland.
The songs of legends, the melodies of ancient lineages, are most perfectly brought to life again in the symphonic works of our greatest master, Jean Sibelius: his ancestors were farmers in southern Finland, and as with every true Finn, the strength of his being springs from nature; his connection to the myths of the people is profound.
The mythical material of his Kullervo Symphony and the Kalevala Suites has led to comparisons with Wagner, yet the difference is great: the stage belongs to Wagner, while in Sibelius the dramatic action unfolds within the symphony itself.
Parallels have also been drawn with Tchaikovsky due to the usage of folk tunes, yet with Tchaikovsky, they are woven into the whole as independent parts, and with Sibelius, as a genius and master of technique, he creatively shapes the thousand melodies alive in his blood into a new, perfect unity.
Kleister is also a child of his time: very thoughtful, but not intellectual; romantic, yet without sentimentality; powerful—without seeking to make an impact - he is a son of the North, and struggle and doubt wrestle for clarity and resolution.

Väinämöinen’s kantele has been preserved in Finland in a transformed form through him - music is the spiritual heart of the Finnish people.

*Väinämöinen took his leave*
*But he left the harp behind:*
*He left his beautiful music in Suomi*
*For the people’s eternal joy,*
*His beautiful song for the children of Suomi.*



**Jean Sibelius, the creator of a distinctive national musical art**

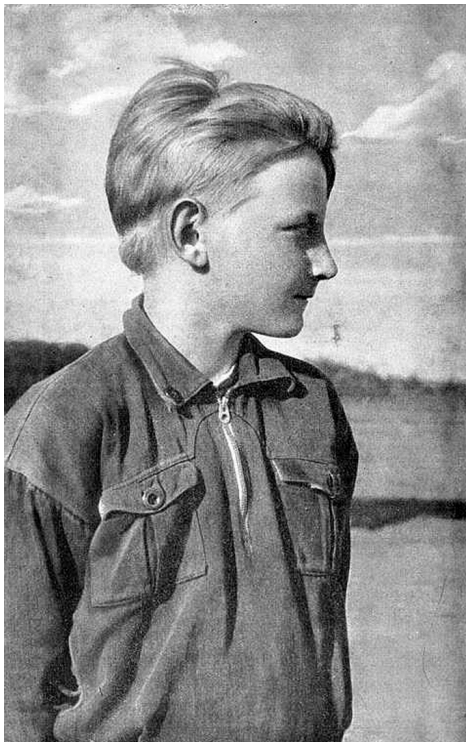


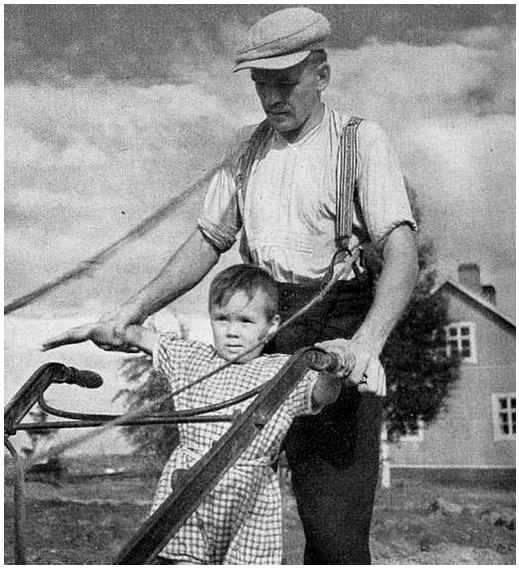
**Yrjö Kilpinen, the greatest song composer**

## Sisu

1939–1940 - in a war lasting three and a half months, the Finnish people—in proportion to their national strength and the strength of their country—fought for peace for their homeland at the cost of immense sacrifices in terms of life and limb.
On the very first day of peace, people set to work with redoubled energy, which an outsider would have found difficult to understand - outwardly, life went on as before, and people did not speak of misfortune, nor did they feel hatred toward the enemy, but simply worked with gritted teeth for a new, better, stronger Finland.
The defeat was great, but the victory—the inner victory—was even greater: the people achieved an unprecedented unity, and the country's freedom was saved.

The national strength of Finland has passed a severe test and proven itself equal to the traditional strength of the ancestors - this spiritual and mental strength, which the Finns call "sisu" and the Germans call "megin"—which has always made the impossible possible—will also emerge victorious over the difficult tasks of the present and the future.
Sisu demands that the people carry through to the very end whatever they have set as their goal, and with Sisu, the Finn either triumphs or falls—but never yields.
It is like an inner command, a duty toward ancestors and descendants: the goal of the Finnish people is to preserve for their children a free country that participates in the new future of Europe.





**The new generation**

**Healthy youth — a strong state**

**Field Marshal Mannerheim, founder and Supreme Commander of the Finnish armed forces**

**The Finnish flag — a symbol of its commitment to freedom**